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Laughing [until/because] it Hurts: Finding Time for Queer Joy and Belonging through Art and Aesthetics

Amy Keating, *Western University*

Supervisor: Roulston, Chris, *The University of Western Ontario*

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Abstract

This thesis explores queer art and aesthetics as rich in potential for the affects of queer joy and queer belonging. In addition to existing in a world that punishes deviance from systemic norms, marginalized groups are expected to be the leaders of systemic deconstruction. Moreover, I argue that the constraints of chrononormativity uniquely affect queer folks. These burdens are heavy. How, then, do queers find time for laughter? How do they create the opportunity to connect without the immediate pressure of socio-political reformation? When reformation is critical for survival, how do queer folks make time for joy? Research often prioritizes narratives of queer victimization, and although important, I contend that queer existence is joyful. Given the frequency with which art and aesthetics feature as conduits of affect, I explore four contemporary artworks as sites where queer joy and queer belonging occur. Through encounters with art, we may become untethered from the fast-paced temporality of capitalism and other systems of oppression. The theoretical frameworks of queer phenomenology, queer temporality, and affect theory undergird my perspective.

I provide analyses of a creative nonfiction essay entitled *Time is the Thing a Body Moves Through* by teacher, artist, and writer T Fleischmann (2019); my experience of the exhibition *Camp: Notes on Fashion* (2019) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art; a live performance by queercore band *Hunx and His Punx;* and finally I document the promising glimmers of queer stick-and-poke tattooing. Through these artworks, I demonstrate how queer aesthetics can forge an alternative relationship to temporality. This thesis, therefore, shows how queers have been using art to create their own temporal worlds that foster joy and belonging.

Keywords

Keywords: queer joy, queer belonging, queer phenomenology, queer temporality, affect theory, aesthetics, queer art, camp, queercore, stick-and-poke tattoos

Summary for Lay Audience

This thesis explores queer art as having the capacity to create queer joy and queer belonging. I suggest that queer folks are burdened by the constraints of an oppressive world. Additionally, there is an expectation that oppressed groups ought to lead social change and activist efforts. During a time when oppression and hatred seem to be on the rise, social change is necessary for survival. How, then, do queers find time for laughter? Or for the opportunity to connect and relate without the immediate pressure of making the world a better place? How do queer folks make time for queer joy?

By attending to time and temporality, I suggest that the expectations of the fast-paced nature of capitalism and other oppressive systems constrain our bodies. Therefore, I argue for the possibility of queer art to foster an embodied reprieve from these constraints: feelings which I call *queer belonging* and *queer joy*. Queer aesthetics can demonstrate alternative temporal values outside of the speed of capitalism. To illustrate this, I examine four contemporary artworks as sites where queer joy and queer belonging occur. These works include: a creative nonfiction essay entitled *Time is the Thing a Body Moves Through*, by T Fleischmann (2019); an exhibition from the Metropolitan Museum of Art called *Camp: Notes on Fashion* (2019); an underground queercore concert performed by *Hunx and His Punx*; and finally, the amateur practice of queer stick-and-poke, or non-machine tattooing. Through analysis of these artworks, this thesis shows how queers have been using art to create their own worlds that foster joy and belonging.

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Chapter 1

1 Introduction: Looking Toward Joy and Belonging

Jokes really are most of it, for Benjy and me. Our conversations are filled with laughing, as is most of our time working on the art. A good laugh is most of what it takes for us to find meaning, in the way that two people can always make their own meanings. A favorite joke lately is the idea that the art is going to make us rich, that we'll finally be wealthy, wealthy artists, instead of tax dodgers, underemployed in our temporary employment.

"Hello Mr. Moma? Yes, you can have these photos for thirty million dollars," I say.
"For you, Mrs. The Guggenheim," Benjy answers, "the sculpture will cost double that."
-T Fleischmann, *Time is the Thing a Body Moves Through* (2019, p. 113)

As economic precarity, housing crises, food insecurity, and ongoing right-wing anti-trans and anti-queer rhetoric increase, the socio-political quotidian life for LGBTQIA2S+ folks in 2020s North America feels increasingly troubling (Donnini, 2024; CBC, 2024; Tunney, 2024). Given the severity of these issues, I want to suggest that the temporal rhythms of contemporary norms do not allow for moments of queer silliness or absurdity; they do not make space for queer joy or belonging. While existing in a world devised to punish any deviance from systemic norms, marginalized groups are also expected to be the leaders of systemic deconstruction and reconstruction (Lorde, 1984). Cumulatively, these burdens are heavy. How, then, do queers find time for reprieve through the inane and frivolous, for laughter, or for the opportunity to connect and relate without the ongoing pressure of socio-political reformation? When reformation is critical for survival, how do queer folks make time for joy? My dissertation explores how queer communities nonetheless find time for shared laughter and connection.

Through an exploration of art and aesthetics, I demonstrate how queer people create temporal spaces for the affects of joy and belonging.

My research is shaped by the material realities of our North American contemporary circumstances in the late 2010s and early 2020s. Alongside a widely broadcast increase in queer- and transphobic hate (Sonoma, 2023; Donnini, 2023; Empson, 2023; Tran, 2024; Carter, 2024), the structure of late capitalism, as it is reciprocally reinforced by heteronormativity, colonialism, ableism, and racism, is deeply burdensome for people with queer identities. Throughout this thesis, I contend that the chrononormative temporality produced by these dominant structures precludes the possibility of existential reprieve for marginalized groups, something that might be found through moments of belonging and joy. While I recognize the ongoing need to strive for systemic change, I argue that there must also exist other ways of being: spaces in which we might feel, however fleetingly, untethered from the demands of our unjust world. By taking time to prioritize the queer aesthetics we can discover through dawdling, skirting linear trajectories, playfulness, camp, bad tattoos, failures, DIY clothing, laughing until we cry and screaming along to punk songs in a crowd of sweaty queers, I suggest that we are creating moments of belonging and joy *despite* it all.

Belonging is a condition not readily available to queer people. The forward march of capitalism repeatedly occludes moments of queer joy. This does not mean that queers do not have these experiences. Indeed, I suggest that queer existence regularly incorporates moments of laughter and joy, and that we can and continue to forge these moments for ourselves. Throughout my thesis, I explore a variety of queer artistic and aesthetic encounters that span the genres of creative writing, curated art exhibits, live

performance, and even amateur tattoos. Art and aesthetics are affectively capacious, offering potential embodied reprieve for queers who are out of step with chrononormativity. Through these artistic encounters, I intend to show that we are creating temporal mappings of our own, wherein we might waste time and dwell in laughing fits that are free from the burden of our oppressive circumstances and the need for socio-political transformation.

While some of my examples include retellings and analyses of special occasions I do not regularly access as a low-income academic queer, such as a concert in Brooklyn, New York, and an exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, I argue that these experiences are not limited to the confines of larger institutions or niche concert venues. Although these might demonstrate meaningful moments, queers can and do create these artistic engagements in their everyday worlds. By exploring processes of creating art, regardless of skill or final product, I believe that many of us are cultivating queerly temporal spaces. I do not think it is adequate or accurate to portray marginalized existence as merely victimized, bleak, or without agency. While these are elements of a complex queer existence, they do not encompass the entirety of the queer experience.

This thesis approaches artistic and aesthetic encounters through the lenses of queer theory, queer phenomenology, temporality, and affect. Using these theoretical frameworks, I unpack the possibilities of art for queer belonging and joy through specific examples that emerged through my own experiences and interest in queer art. I begin by situating myself within the broader conversations of queer affect and the growing contemporary literature engaging the concept of queer joy. Following this, I provide an in-depth discussion of my engagement with the theorists who have shaped my

understanding of queer time, embodiment, and aesthetics. After detailing my conceptual underpinnings developed through these theoretical understandings, I run through a brief overview of my chapters' trajectories. This project pays homage to the imaginations and creativity of queer art and artists who have and will continue to show us how and why we laugh until it hurts, because it hurts.

1.1 Literature Review

1.1.1 Negative Affect

The number of queer theorists who have explored the affects of joy and belonging is relatively small. This is in part due to queer theory's turn to negative affects in the face of hollow conceptions of political progress for LGBTQIA2S+ rights. Many theorists see positive affects as operating in and through dominant oppressive systems. In *Looking Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History,* Heather Love turns to negative affects in response to narratives of forward progress for queer liberation, such as Pride marches and the fight for same-sex marriage (2007; Chinn, 2011). She challenges the perceived linearity of queer rights which suggests that gay pride is the antidote to gay shame. In drawing attention to ongoing queer pain, Love asserts that the negativity of the past (and present) is informative and should not be erased through false narratives of progress and liberation (2007). Jack Halberstam's *Queer Art of Failure* points to where queers fall short, stick out, resist, and/or are not good enough, sifting through the possibilities of existing in failure (2011). Sara Ahmed's *Promise of Happiness* explores the figure of the killjoy and reveals that what is touted as the "happy life" is the neoliberal and capitalist life which forecloses queer possibility (2010). Lauren Berlant exposes the optimistic

promises of colonial capitalism as unachievable, yet we work toward them through participation in systems that harm us (2011). My focus on what might at first glance appear to be the positive affects of belonging and joy does not seek to negate these works and their significance for theorizing queer lives. Rather, I want to build on these ideas. I contend that we ought to continue challenging normatively positive affects to show how they are operationalized toward a neoliberal capitalist logic. Yet I am also searching for the cultivation of possibly "positive" queer affects that resist the harms of systemic oppression. I believe that queer joy and belonging are to some degree intermingled with negative queer affects in that joy and belonging hinge upon knowledge or experience of a world that is not made for queer and trans lives. I show how there are ways that queer art and artists can create meaningful joy and belonging that circumvent the harms of capitalist heteronormativity.

As I look toward art and aesthetics as possible sites for queering temporality, I draw from queer theorists who engage in related projects. In *Time Slips: Queer Temporalities, Contemporary Performance, and the Hole of History*, Jack Pryor investigates performance as cultivating temporal spaces outside of chrononormativity that can offer potential moments for healing queer trauma. I use their work to enrich and support my own exploration of art's capacity to be temporally transformative. Pryor argues that these alternative temporalities simultaneously expose the inequalities of systems that impose trauma and harm (2017, p. 7). They refer to these moments as "time slips," during which there is time to dwell on and work towards healing these injuries. Like Pryor, my work contends that chrononormativity elides possibilities for queer connection and forms of healing. Yet rather than focusing exclusively on trauma, I seek

to understand moments of connection and belonging that occur through the joyful alongside the traumatic.

1.1.2 Turning to Queer Joy

Since I began this project, there has been a significant increase in research addressing the concept of queer joy. It appears that there is a recent collective yearning to explore these seemingly more positive affects of queer experience. In my overview of this more contemporary work, I will show how my position diverges from or expands upon these accounts of queer joy. Much of this scholarship attends to queer joy as a revolutionary force, recognizing that queer experiences, far from being a one-dimensional narrative as often shown in the media and even academic research, are a mix of joy and suffering. I have subcategorized these publications into common themes that correspond to their understanding and application of queer joy as a concept. One of the few accounts of uncovering "positive" queer affect through art and aesthetics can be found in summarizing Alvin Alagao's account of "queer optimism" through the art of Oscar de Zalameda (2022). I also outline research that turns to examples of queer joy throughout history to illuminate queer and trans resistance that may provide insight into contemporary queer issues. My next subsection investigates the importance of Black queer and Queer of Colour joy in the context of current political crises that target racialized and queer identities. Finally, I review research which advocates employing queer joy as praxis.

1.1.2.1 Queer Affect through Art

Alvin Alagao writes on the affect of *queer optimism* via the work of Filippino artist, Oscar de Zalameda. While this is not squarely an account of "queer joy," Alagao's understanding of queer optimism as an affect constituted through aesthetics parallels my conceptualization of queer joy as an affect which can be cultivated through queer art. Alagao also references the negative affective turn in queer studies, in which theorists expose the hypocrisy of working for inclusion within a neo-liberal capitalist world. Alagao specifically draws from Lauren Berlant's "cruel optimism" (2022) and contends that it is valuable to make space for these negative accounts, as the current world is not conducive to queer flourishing. Yet, Alagao argues we should not discount the force of positive affects. Borrowing from Michael Snediker's account of "queer optimism," Alagao argues that we can embrace optimism and happiness without abandoning the "lofty goals of working towards a better world in the present" (2022, p. 113). Queer optimism invokes temporality as an affect that exists in the present, for "it doesn't ask for some future time to make good on its own hopes" (2022, p. 120). Attending to Zalameda's works and incorporated aesthetics, Alagao shows that these can produce the affect of queer optimism. Zalameda's usage of vibrant jewel-toned colours enable the viewer to "feel the joy of everyday life" (2022, p. 122). Additionally, the artist invokes the past and future of the painted moment simultaneously through the application of "temporal bands" that anchor the viewer in the present, which for Alagao is the site of queer optimism.

While acknowledging the challenges of his geopolitical context and the imperfect status of queer rights and protections in the Philippines, Alagao writes "I do not want to wait for the coming of queer utopia before I can work on being happy" (2022, p. 125).

This statement resonates with my own motivations to uncover queer joy and belonging. Like Alagao, I look to art as fostering the affect of queer joy, and I suggest this is something that can be created even within our challenging current circumstances.

1.1.2.2 Histories of Queer Joy

Caio Simões de Araújo explores how carnival traditions in mid-century Lourenço Marques, Mozambique, challenged normative notions of temporality and became a space for participants to explore transgressive forms of gender and sexuality (2023). Drawing from Mikhail Bakhtin's conception of the carnivalesque, they analyze archival and oral histories from this carnival period. De Araújo argues that although these carnivals offered circumscribed moments for gender and sexual transgressions, they created a complex tension in that they were still contained within the framework of the colonial carnival. For De Araújo, looking to moments of gender and sexual transgression within and beyond archival records through the lens of the carnivalesque shows the "dynamics of social visibility and collective joy, of boundary-making and border-crossing, of emerging countercultural formations and practices of world-making" (2023, p. 200). De Araújo's work points to the ways in which queer people transgress and create joy for themselves in and through their situated material circumstances, challenging normative conceptions of temporality. This enriches accounts of queer histories and highlights how queers have experienced and created joy and playfulness, even within a repressive socio-political context.

Marisa Turesky and Jonathan Crisman (2023) also draw from queer archives to explore the history of Pride planning in Los Angeles. By researching early renditions of LA Pride, they uncover how radical planning for Pride events can be conducive to queer

joy. Turesky and Crisman are responding in part to how Pride parades have evolved into events increasingly shaped by a neo-liberal lens, preventing much of the radicality that was intrinsic to early Pride. The authors borrow from Sara Ahmed's *feminist killjoy* and theories of Black joy to shape their conception of queer joy, arguing that it is "constituted from all that is antithetical to patriarchal culture," and that it "also disrupts the comfort of that culture" (2023, p. 270). Turesky and Crisman suggest that as heterogenous queer groups in early Pride events embraced joy in their transgressive identities in public spaces in LA, these early celebrations which were developed through radical planning practices fostered a *spatialized* queer joy. Similarly to Araújo's historical research on carnivals in Mozambique, this analysis can tell us how queer people have always found ways to create joy for themselves, despite oppressive circumstances.

1.1.2.3 Black Queer Joy and Queer of Colour Joy in Times of Crisis

Other Queer of Colour theorists show how our contemporary moment accounts for the ways queer experiences produce joy alongside oppressive circumstances. Christopher Persaud and Ashon Crawley speak to the potential of Black queer joy via the digital realm through a lens they claim feels more optimistic than their peers in the discipline of media studies (2022). Using rapper and artist Lil Nas X's online presence as an example of enacting Black queer joy as resistance, they discuss how people are using digital space to push back against violent anti-black and anti-queer regimes, noting that there is much pleasure to be found in the digital life:

> The simplicity of our breath and our being and our becoming is itself celebratory. Joy as the desire to cultivate or really attempt to be tender with our fragility as human creatures. Joy for me is the recognition of that complexity. (2022, p. 2)

For these theorists, claiming Black queer joy goes beyond resilience in the face oppression. Rather, it means embracing tenderness and vulnerability, alongside celebrating marginalized identities. Because institutions are built upon structures of racialized violence, the authors suggest that institutions are "wary" of Black queer joy as it entails the recognition of the "terribleness with which [they] exist" (2022, p. 2). Thus, Black queer joy both subverts dominant structures while also recognizing the obstacles and harms sanctioned by prevailing institutions and the violence of pervasive racism, colonialism, and queerphobia.

Reagan Mitchell also turns to artistic figures who demonstrate the possibilities of Black queer joy within the material context of both racial and queer battle "fatigues" (2022, p. 945). While making a case for the need to consider queer and black violence intersectionally, Mitchell writes that violence against Black queer persons is a "broader mobilized violence rooted in the repression, attack, and fear of Black queer joy" (2022, p. 944). Through an analysis of media appearances and art, Mitchell's account shows how influential disco artist Sylvester, and rapper and multimedia artist, Big Freedia, demonstrate Black queer joy. Mitchell argues that part of their public personae entails negotiating how to present their Black queer joy to larger audiences, noting that these figures are limited by the impositions of a queerphobic and racist world. He contends that mainstream culture desires to consume Black queer art but fails to respect and love the

identities of the people who create it. Mitchell is also writing about Black queer joy to challenge anti-oppression discourses that only prioritize baseline survival.

Michael Tristano Jr explores Queer of Colour joy through an autoethnographic reflection of the possibilities of queer nightclub spaces. Tristano also turns to Queer of Colour joy to resist the one-dimensional narratives of victimization. In researching the tragedy of the Pulse Nightclub shootings in Orlando in 2016, he finds that prevalent accounts of grief and oppression, while important, do not provide a holistic picture of the lived experiences of queer People of Colour. Rather, merely reproducing narratives of victimization reifies the white colonial liberalist idea that "minoritarian subjects are always already understood as marginalized and incapable of experiencing anything other than trauma" (2022, p. 277). He argues for the need to center minoritarian joy as resisting the "climate of collective crisis" (2022, p. 276). For Tristano, crisis can provide information as to where work needs to be done, yet we cannot only focus on crisis to make change. Tristano provides an account of Queer of Colour joy that becomes a launching point for other theorists in the broader conversation on queer joy:

> Our joy holds immense power. We produce joy *in spite* of the material realities and structures of power placed upon us. It is a survival mechanism. A joyous state allows us to explore the limits of human curiosity; renegotiate what relationships can look, feel, sound, and smell like; and use desire to propel us through the social world where we refuse colonial futures and expand decolonial options. Queer of Color joy is vital for creating better and more sustainable worlds. (2022, p. 279, emphasis in original)

Thus, for Tristano and others, we can envision and enact alternative ways of being by centring joy. Insisting on this added complexity of queer experience challenges the revictimization of Queers of Colour. Like most of these theorists, I seek to find how people create and feel joy *in spite* of the non-utopic circumstances of the material world in which they find themselves. In my view, such framing specifically denotes that queer joy is not dependent upon our normative structures; we do not have to wait for dominant society's permission to create queer joy.

Stacey Copeland addresses the possibilities of queer joy through queer music podcasting by focusing on a long-running podcast which centers the work of queer musicians, *Homoground* (2023). Drawing from Jose Estéban Muñoz's concept of queerness as "the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world" (Muñoz, 2009, p. 1), they discuss how Homoground is an example of a "queer world-making" project which actively works to center the BIPOC and trans voices that are often excluded in broader conversations about queer representation. They also conceptualize queer joy as challenging "the dominant narrative that being queer is exclusively rooted in pain or trauma," and instead recognize "the resilience, resistance, and creativity of LGBTQ+ people" (2023, p. 13). Like prior theorists, Copeland acknowledges the theories put forward by Berlant's "cruel optimism" and Sara Ahmed's "promise of happiness," as being important affective accounts that inform queer joy. They draw upon the work of Tristano as well as Persaud and Crawley to further examine how queer joy can be a complimentary expression and affect alongside other political tools that embrace negativity. While these scholars have

described similar goals and frameworks for queer joy, I will consider this affect in more detail in relation to normative conceptions of temporality.

1.1.2.4 Queer Joy in Practice

This final section follows the possibilities of centring queer joy within educational and therapeutic practices. Much like the scholarship outlined above, these works are primarily motivated by the incomplete picture of solely queer and trans suffering that reifies LGBTQIA2S+ identities and narratives as merely tragic victims of oppression. Art therapists Zachary Van Den Berg and Mikey Anderson advocate for centring queer-worldmaking through sex-positive art therapy (2023). Their research highlights how art might be conducive to queer joy and pleasure when it is created through therapeutic and healing practices. Van Den Berg and Anderson suggest that clients can "follow pleasure as they venture into imaginal realms" (2023, p. 192), through creative projects that invoke queer, disabled, fat, and trans sex positivity and by creating a radically inclusive practice space or studio. This artistic production of queer joy and pleasure can be informative for practitioners understanding the further wellbeing of their clients (2023, p. 191). Similarly, I follow the connection between art, aesthetics, and queer joy, but I detail the ways in which it affectively emerges through mutual encounters and the process of creation.

The following researchers seek to operationalize queer joy in the context of North American education. Advocating for centring the possibility of queer joy in schools is also a part of diversifying the narratives of LGBTQIA2S+ life and identity beyond trauma and suffering alongside creating safe and enjoyable education spaces for queer and trans youth. Antonio Duran and Roland Sintos Coloma suggest that educational

content and discourse surrounding LGBTQIA2S+ identity still prioritize the harm felt by these marginalized communities (2023). While it is important to be aware of the struggles faced by queer people in the face of queerphobic and transphobic violence, they argue that institutional leaders, and thus educators, must recognize that policies and practice should be "not only about mitigating harm, but also about bolstering queer joy" (2023, p. 118). These theorists also draw from the works of Tristano and Mitchell to frame their idea of queer joy as being resistant to current structures of oppression. They suggest that centring joy can be a way of pushing back against heteronormative educational structures.

Similarly, Melissa Keehn and Casey Burkholder argue for the inclusion of queer joy in sex education in their work on New Brunswick, Canada. Centring the joy and pleasure of queer and trans people expands the curriculum beyond narratives of victimization and suffering. Ultimately, queer joy in practice can be useful for troubling New Brunswick's heteronormative and cisnormative sex education curricula (2024). Their construction of the possibilities of queer joy reference Tristano, and this research responds to some degree to Duran and Coloma's call for operationalizing queer joy in the classroom. Additionally, in a publication dedicated to resources for elementary and secondary school teachers, *English Journal,* Julianna Iacovelli promotes utilizing texts that centre queer joy in educational contexts to challenge the "bury your gays" trope that pervades various forms of queer media (2022). She provides concrete materials that teachers may assign where queerness is explored through a lens of joy rather than harm.

Beyond the classroom, Keehn, Burkholder, Katie MacEntee, Megan Hill, Aaron Beaumont, and Symone Hunt explore the possibilities of queer joy through worldmaking

via DIY art in a series of participatory action research sessions. The researchers look toward connections across queer and trans generations to enrich the understanding of what it means to be 2SLGBTQIA+ in Atlantic Canada. Through the practices of crafting and art, they uncover and focus on the textured narratives of queer and trans lives by "uplifting everyday moments of queer and trans worlds" (2024, p. 2). They utilize a conception of queer joy that is developed through Keehn and Burkholder's previous work and by referencing Tristano alongside Persaud and Crawley. Drawing from the conceptualization of queer world-making via Berlant and Michael Warner, they suggest creativity outside of normative expectations of queer and trans existence allows for the possibility of envisioning futures and alternative worlds beyond the limitations of the here and now. Similarly to Van Den Berg and Anderson, they suggest that art can open possibility by allowing things to be unfinished, through the process of creation, and through its messiness and chaos. Moreover, by foregrounding the value of everyday moments, they show the possibility of joyfulness in lived queer and trans experiences. My own thesis project researches these possibilities through similar aesthetic practices while also aiming to demonstrate the joy and belonging in queer lives, adding to the complexity of our lived experiences. My approach looks beyond the institutional, exploring ways queers have been and continue to create joyful possibilities for themselves through contemporary art practice and encounters.

1.1.3 Adding to the Conversation

Alongside the above researchers my project is also motivated by the exhaustion of covering merely the harm and trauma felt by queers in our historical and current realities. Moreover, these theorists show that centring joy does not mean negating, denying, or

ignoring the importance of researching queer trauma and harm. My analysis further extends the affective *feeling* of queer joy through a temporal and phenomenological lens. I explicitly work to uncover how this affect might be created through queer art and aesthetics. Although I contend that the findings in this thesis may contribute to forms of queer activism (and to some extent, I would hope that they do), I want to uncover queer joy for *its own sake.* While I suggest that queer joy is subversive, I do not align it with political reformation. While uncovering joy *so that it can* be utilized for a greater purpose has value, this might echo the model of constant productivity which values something insofar as it is *productive*. Alternatively, I work to uncover joy and belonging in themselves: silliness, inanity, absurdity, playfulness, all freed from a direct purpose, detaching them from the linearity of productivity and capitalism.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

My thesis engages with the frameworks of queer theory, queer phenomenology, temporality, and affect, as well as art and aesthetics, to uncover the experiences of queer joy and belonging as they are cultivated through queer art. This section outlines my understandings of these frameworks through their foundational authors.

1.2.1 Queer and Queer Theory

Throughout my dissertation, I use “queer” as an adjective, noun, and verb. It can be used to describe individuals whose identities fall outside of gender and/or sexuality norms and to suggest this of other nouns (for example, queer aesthetics). Queer as a verb, or queering, refers to challenging the socially constructed rigidity of normative systems,

such as gender and sexuality (Jagose, 1996). I opt to use the term "queer" rather than LGBTQIA2S+. Unlike the longer acronym, the term pointedly illustrates a mode of existing that has an intentional political valence of subversion and transgression. "Queerness," in this way describes being "non-normative" in one's gender or sexual identity, and simultaneously it challenges constructed "normative" ways of existing in the world. Annamarie Jagose describes queerness as follows:

> Broadly speaking, queer describes those gestures or analytical models which dramatize incoherences in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire. Resisting that model of stability—which claims heterosexuality as its origin when it is more properly its effect—queer focuses on mismatches between sex, gender and desire. (1996, p. 3)

Despite theorists' inability to agree on a consistent definition of the term "queer," the one relative constant that appears is its purposeful challenge of static identities within both sexuality and gender. Informed by early gay and lesbian movements, queerness subverts gender essentialism (Jagose, 1996, p. 57). This is not to suggest that all gay and lesbian theorists insist upon gender essentialism, but to highlight that queer specifically indicates fluidity depending on cultural and historical contexts (1996, p. 98). It contains the potential to challenge static identities while also shifting its definition through time, space, and communities so that "by refusing to crystallise in any specific form, queer maintains a relation of resistance to whatever constitutes the normal" (Jagose 1996, p. 99). Therefore, I take queer to function throughout *and* beyond gender and sexual identities by challenging conventional modes of existing in the world.

To this end, I engage with Sara Ahmed's understanding of "queer" and queer embodiment through phenomenology. In her early discussions of queerness in phenomenology, Ahmed highlights her use of the term "queer" in two different ways. Queer works as a directional relationship, in that to move queerly is to move obliquely, or to become aslant to a "straight" path. She also uses it in the context of sexuality, particularly her own lesbian identity:

> It is worth noting here that I have been using queer in at least two senses and have at times slid from one sense to the other. I have used it to describe what is oblique or off-line or just plain wonky. I have also used the term to describe nonstraight sexual practices—in particular lesbianism—as a form of social and sexual contact. I think it is important to retain both meanings of the word queer, which after all are historically related even if irreducible to each other. (2006a, p. 565)

In a similar fashion to Jagose, Ahmed's usage of the term suggests that the two definitions' irreducibility means that beyond sexuality, queerness is also a deviation from any compulsory normalities. To be queer is to be sexually non-straight but also to take on a deviant path. As such, to be queer means to be oppositional to frameworks of normativity. I highlight this other way of explaining queerness to signal the spatial and embodied connection of existing queerly in a straight world.

1.2.2 Queer Phenomenology and Embodiment

To further emphasize the embodiment of queerness, I not only take my definition of "queer" from Ahmed, but I also find theoretical (and methodological) grounding through her queer phenomenology. Queer phenomenology accounts for the ways objects come into focus, and how, in a world built through heteronormativity, queerness is beyond our

grasp. Turning toward queerness means turning away from the straight line (Ahmed, 2006b). Through their reproduction (in its many senses of the term), heterosexual objects and practices are normative in that they are more readily available, as many of us are born into and raised in these environments. Heterosexual objects and practices also form the background of our material world as they become so naturalized through their constant repetition that they disappear from view, and thus seem "normal" (2006b, p. 72). Queerness, then, denotes deviating bodies that do not easily coalesce into the heteronormative background; it is the turning away from the heteronormative "straight line" (Ahmed, 2006b, p. 70). This attention to bodies moving through the world is pertinent to my project, particularly as I acknowledge the ways worlds are temporally structured. The way time is construed can affect how bodies move through the world, and queer phenomenology illuminates the relationships between bodies and worlds. It also reveals that objects and bodies are not neutral; how they appear is not coincidental but shaped through a material history. Ahmed furthers explores our relationship to encountering objects within *The Promise of Happiness*. She discusses how a promise of "happiness" is touted in contemporary western normative and capitalist cultures to maintain the reproduction of this order that privileges particular (heterosexual) objects (2010). Given that we are shaped through these encounters and our material histories, exploring artworks means attending to our embodied histories and to how we encounter objects as non-neutral subjects.

This embodiment of queer existence also speaks directly to disabled and racialized forms of embodiment. Robert McRuer describes compulsory able-bodiedness, writing that "able-bodiedness, like heterosexuality... is able to pass as the natural state of

things due to its uninterrogated attachment, for more than two centuries, to ideas of what is ‘normal’” (2020, p. 62). McRuer further argues that able-bodiedness is attached to capitalism's expectations of labour and productivity (2020, p. 62). Similarly, subjects that are racialized through their embodiment are subject to stereotypical expectations. Axelle Karera details a critical phenomenological account of race by reflecting on the work of Franz Fanon. She argues, “rather than finding the existential conditions under which one’s body and the world join in a perpetual motion of reciprocal affection,” Fanon uncovers how “the racialized body is forcefully relegated to the realm of mere ‘things’ that occupy space differently than a body-subject would and is exposed to the instrumental will of another” (2020, p. 290). Bodies that deviate from these norms also fail to “align” with linear pathways, making them “oblique” and perhaps queer (Ahmed, 2006a, p. 565). This is not to suggest queerness, race, and ability collapse into one another, but to highlight the types of embodiment considered outside of normative linearity. Given this, bodies that reject or fail to fit within a norm are then also seen as being oblique, or ‘queer’ in the ‘strange’ sense of the word.

1.2.3 Time, Temporality, and Chrononormativity

Instrumental to my analyses of art, aesthetics, and their affective properties is Elizabeth Freeman’s concept of chrononormativity, a term that outlines how standard temporal structures constrain our embodiment. In *Time Binds*: *Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (2010), Freeman conceptualizes chrononormativity as the dominant temporal structure of our socio-economic and political systems, giving value to specific temporal rhythms:

> By “time binds,” I mean something beyond the obvious point that people find themselves with less time than they need. Instead, I mean that naked flesh is bound into socially meaningful embodiment through temporal regulation: binding is what turns mere existence into a form of mastery in a process I’ll refer to as chrononormativity, or the use of time to organize individual bodies toward maximum productivity. (Freeman, 2010, p. 3)

Chrononormativity thus refers to the socially reinforced expectations of how we spend our time, which viscerally bind our very flesh. The temporal rhythm that is expected and valued by societal structures depends upon spatial location and historical context. Through a Marxist analysis of various forms of queer art, photography, and film history, Freeman concludes that the chrononormative timeline is a North American ideal that requires heteronormativity and participation in what I refer to throughout this thesis as hyperproductive capitalism.

Freeman engages with the Marxist critique that sees our bodies as organized according to their capacity for labour, arguing that:

> In the eyes of the state, this sequence of socioeconomically “productive” moments is what it means to have a life at all. And in zones not fully reproducible to the state—in, say, psychiatry, medicine, and law— to have a life entails the ability to narrate it not only in these state-sanctioned terms, but also in a novelistic framework: as event-centred, goal-oriented, intentional, and culminating epiphanies or major transformations. (2010, pp. 4-5)

Our respective (western) nations valorize our citizenship through what we can produce economically. We are respected members of society if we have a job, and this level of

respect depends upon the job's socially constructed worth. We are even more respected when we dedicate most of our energy and time toward this job or our performance in this job. Even time for rest is valued insofar as it contributes to efficient performance in work. We are expected and encouraged to follow a teleology of specific achievements: the ideal body, the perfect family, the job promotion (2010, p. 51). These temporal expectations also cohere with Ahmed's conceptualization of heteronormativity as existing in a straight line, which includes a linear trajectory of the correct events in the correct order: such as graduating from school, getting married, then having children (2006b). Our respectability and participation in society is framed by how much we are contributing economically and how much time we are devoting to our work. As the gap of economic distribution persistently widens and the cost of living continues to rise globally, not only are we increasingly valued in terms of how much we can contribute economically through our labour, but our survival depends on it.

The path connecting the temporal organization of our bodies to capitalism and hyperproductivity is (perhaps not coincidentally) straightforward. Furthermore, the connection to heteronormativity is equally fundamental. Freeman's discussion of the rise of industrialized time in middle-class America is contextualized through the advent of photography and film, as well as within ideals of the domestic woman in the 1950s and 60s. Tracing the evolution of photography and film, Freeman illuminates how heterosexual time became essential to shaping dutiful citizens. As photography progressed and became more widely available to the middle class, the family portrait was instrumental in highlighting the temporal rhythms of the family (Freeman, 2010). As more people had access to cameras and portraiture, the trend of photographing a "family"

also encompassed social cues of how to organize the photograph to indicate one's place in the family (Freeman, 2010, pp. 23-24). Often this meant older relatives were posed at the back of the photograph with children in front. The highlighting of the children, for Freeman, represents reprofuturity. Freeman borrows this concept from Lee Edelman, whose polemic exposes a common political theme of framing ethics around futurity, and that this futurity is represented by the "Child" (Edelman, 2013).

Freeman also shows how chrononormativity deeply affects queer subjects to the point of asynchronicity. As these temporal rhythms are expected to feel "natural" through constant policing and social discipline (2010, p. 18), queers tend to fail when attempting to fit into gender/heterosexual/capitalist expectations (Halberstam, 2011; Muñoz, 2009). Because queers do not align with traditional familial linearity, they often begin to veer away from the expectation of maximum labour and maximum efficiency in a capitalist context. However, as the world continues to become globalized at a capitalist pace far beyond the capitalism of Marx's time, queers still tend to stumble in the face of chrononormativity. I suggest that this is exacerbated through the rampant increase in technologies, as artificial intelligence (AI) platforms proliferate into daily usage with creators proclaiming they will make our lives easier. Yet, given the patterns exemplified through the hyperproductive nature of capitalism, it is not likely that any time saved from utilizing these technologies will become time for rest or pause. I hypothesize that we will be expected to use this saved time to continue to produce something else, something more. It is this persistent chrononormativity and hyperproduction that I wish to challenge in this thesis. I argue that the enforcement of a normative timeline is particularly exhausting and strenuous for queers who must attempt to navigate it by virtue of existing

in a North American capitalist context. Through an analysis of the embodied and emotional toll this takes upon queer subjects, my intent is to turn to art to show how spaces of queer time can be forged through creativity, which can produce modes of temporal pause. Furthermore, I suggest that this queer time is conducive to 'belonging' and to a feeling of 'joy'.

1.2.4 Affect Theory

Affect theory further elucidates the connection between queer embodiment and aesthetic encounters. The concept of 'affect' and the 'affective turn' have invoked contentious and varied interpretations amongst theorists (Siegworth & Gregg 2010, p. 3; Cvetkovich 2012, p. 3). Despite its varied usages, affect theory generally attends to and blends together elements of historically subjugated forms of knowledge production; it pays a great deal of attention to "emotion, and feeling, and that includes impulses, desires, and feelings that get historically constructed in a range of ways" (Cvetkovich 2012, p. 4). Affect theory means taking 'feelings' seriously, prior to cognitive reflection (Cvetkovich 2012). Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth discuss that affect can be a relational feeling that is comprised of both intimate experience and interrelated bodies, "becoming a palimpsest of force-encounters traversing the ebbs and swells of intensities that pass between 'bodies'" (2010, p. 2). Attention to these feelings also accounts for how they are individual yet interconnected with various bodies. Bodies can be objects, physical settings, or other people. These components make highlighting affect appropriate for uncovering, mapping, and theorizing the feeling of belonging to a queer time and/or space through art. Affect gives space to validate the ephemeral knowledge of fleeting queer experiences that can occur in a glance, or after a concert (Muñoz 2009, p. 70). "An

ephemeral proof," Muñoz writes, "does not count as evidence in some systems of reading and proper documentation" (2009, p. 70). An affective approach is beneficial as it values knowledge held in "the hard and fast materialities, as well as the fleeting and flowing ephemera, of the daily and the workday, of everyday and everynight life" (Siegworth & Gregg 2010, p. 7). Through an affective lens, I pay specific attention to how art can make bodies feel with attention to how normative structures of time can make bodies feel. In *The Promise of Happiness,* Ahmed suggests that as "our bodies change over time, then the world around us will create different impressions" (2010, p. 23). Objects, location, feelings, moods, words, and so forth, can have an impact and leave an impression on us through our embodied apprehensions. Our own movement and bodies concurrently affect other bodies. I use affect theory to attend to how objects and others impress upon our embodied feelings and thus how we can have that effect on others. This lens exposes how encounters with artworks and aesthetic forms also have an embodied affectivity.

1.2.5 Art and Aesthetics

Having shown the importance of queer embodiment(s) to my project, I now explore its presence in and relationship to "art" and "aesthetics." Art, for my purposes, will manifest in various forms. I draw upon creations that contain what I suggest are queer aesthetic elements, arguing for their potential to elicit embodied affects, feelings, and emotions. I develop my conception of art from the general contemporary perspective that favours the "immediacy thesis," stating that aesthetics are elements that are immediately conceivable and graspable through sensory experience (Shelley, 2017, pp. 8-9). This echoes Early Modern philosopher Thomas Reid, who holds that "our external sense may discover qualities which do not depend upon any antecedent perception … but it is impossible to

perceive the beauty of an object, without perceiving the object, or at least conceiving it" (1785, pp. 760-761). My project proceeds from the notion that the apprehension of aesthetic elements, or the forms of an object (which does not necessarily have to be purposefully artistic), is done through bodily encounters. Furthermore, queer fashion theorist Roberto Fillippello, writes of photographic fashion images' ability to provide a Spinozian affective return: these photos have the "simultaneous capacity to affect and be affected," which activates the "periperformative field of aesthetic engagement" (2018, p. 79). Thus, I align my work with the idea that art has the quality of affecting our bodies.

Alongside the element of apprehending aesthetics through our senses, I consider the queer critique of artistic formalism espoused by David Getsy. Getsy explains that a queer reading of aesthetic forms must acknowledge the engagement between form and content: "any queer formal reading must itself be relational, particular, and contingent on its situation and context" (2017, p. 255). My analysis of these embodied experiences will consider how aesthetic elements interrelate and blur into one another to produce affective moments in the encounter, with attention to a situated context. To further consider this relational account of aesthetics, I also turn to aesthetic theorist David Fenner, who posits that an aesthetic experience, similarly to Getsy, is beyond the sum of its formal parts:

> We use aesthetic terms to reference what immediately hits our eyes, ears, or noses. From the basic objective properties of lines, colors, proportions, contrasts, and so forth, we develop a view of an object's aesthetic qualities…The argument still stands, however, that an aesthetic analysis is not the full story when it comes to aesthetic experience. (2003, p. 45)

The immediacy of these "formal" elements is difficult to disentangle from our interpretations of these elements. Thus, when considering aesthetics, Fenner advocates for the consideration of situated circumstances in the apprehension of these elements. I suggest, along with Kadji Amin, Amber Jamilla Musser, and Roy Pérez (2017), that this does not mean reducing the artistic works merely to their socio-political content. Rather, to analyse embodied experiences of lines, colours, proportions, rhythms and so forth, as aesthetic elements, it is necessary to consider cultural, racial, gendered, classed, geographical contexts and histories. As we perceive these forms through our embodied existence, we pay attention to the circumstances that ground our embodied existence, which further reinstates a queerly phenomenological perspective. Through Fillippello, Getsy, and Fenner, I take the aesthetic to work relationally through its contexts, blurring any formal boundaries.

According to Fillippello and Amin et al, the aesthetic experience can conjure an affective experience for the onlookers/participants/perceptive subjects encountering and engaging with the artworks. This can provide us with a queer epistemology: an alternative way of knowing "that operates through feeling rather than rationality" (Fillippello, 2018, p. 79). I work to eschew a Cartesian division between mind and body. Rather, I give credence to a way of knowing that, prior to the "affective turn," was often dismissed because it is obtained through an embodied experience (Cvetkovich, 2012, p. 3).

In my view, this can directly speak to the pressures of chrononormativity. As I contend that a chrononormative worldview that prioritizes heteronormativity and capitalism has an embodied effect upon queers, places of specific aesthetic curation can

likewise affect queer bodies. In my work, I take aesthetics to be the elements of the artwork that elicit these queer feelings and embodied knowledges. I acknowledge that the art itself is situated within multiple networks of relationships that frame aesthetic contexts. By doing this, I can pay attention to colour, material, gesture, technique, curation, all within their situational specificities and the feelings they have the potential to evoke. I hypothesize that this attention to aesthetics as situated and relational can bring forth elements that foster feelings of queer joy and belonging, unlike normative spaces outside of these created peripheral worlds.

1.3 Conceptual Underpinnings

Building upon my theoretical framework, this section posits conceptual understandings that thematically reappear throughout this dissertation. I expand upon chrononormativity and queer phenomenology to frame what I refer to as queer embodied discordance, which outlines how existing in deviant bodies within our current material worlds manifests through visceral discomfort and exhaustion. An explanation of queer embodied discordance foregrounds the necessity for moments of queer belonging which can be created through revaluing temporality. Following this, I provide an overview of how I take up queer aesthetics, connecting their affective capacity to the possibility of new temporal spaces.

1.3.1 Queer Embodied Discordance

Adherence to the expectations of chrononormativity is a burden faced by many (or most) of us, yet I suggest it is uniquely felt by queer subjects. Queer bodies experience

discordance when they are pressured to maintain the hyperproductive expectations of a heteronormative capitalist world: a world within which queers must exist without possibility of belonging. If this discordance is indeed the case, queer bodies require temporal frameworks and spaces in which they can 'unbind' and relax. To exemplify the precarity of heteronormative capitalism, I draw upon Emma Dowling's article "The Waitress: On Affect, Method, and (Re)presentation," which examines affective labour in the service industry (2012). Although the specifics of the labour may differ depending upon the nature of the employment, the pressures to adhere to heteronormativity and capitalism ring true throughout most (if not all) industries. This article resonates with my own experiences in the hospitality industry, yet I see many overlapping ideas as I set forth to pursue a career in academia, where jobs are few and success is increasingly out of reach. Queer folks experience the pressure to perform additional labour that is particularly taxing. Thus, just in virtue of trying to exist within the frameworks of cishetero-normative capitalism, queer subjects are exhausted and often out of step with normative time.

If chrononormativity means organizing the body to produce maximum and efficient labour in a capitalist and heteronormative society, there is extra labour for people who feel as though they do not easily fit into these norms. Both Ahmed and Freeman refer to the spatial and temporal linear organization of the heteronormative world. Ahmed writes that "bodies are sexualized through how they inhabit space. The body orientates itself in space, for instance, by differentiating between 'left' and 'right,' 'up' and 'down,' and 'near' and 'far,' *and this orientation is crucial to the sexualization of bodies*" (2006b, p. 67, emphasis in original). A straight line is a straight path. For Ahmed, a body on this

straight path does not take any detours; it does not stumble here and there, ideally it does not look backward either. Much like Freeman's recollection of the value of reprofuturity through the family portrait, the straightness of this path ensures heteronormativity and family ideals that can continue this linear path. Ahmed argues that by virtue of living in a heteronormative context, heterosexual objects and pathways are made readily available to us (2006b, p. 82). Searching for something that might be queer necessitates looking elsewhere. For Ahmed, this is a turning away from the straight path, finding things oblique or aslant from the linearity we are taught is the only option. We must seek out spaces, people and options that are sometimes hidden, sometimes ephemeral. Moreover, there are many of us who feel as though this straight path does not come naturally, or we find ourselves drifting away from it. My suggestion is that sticking to the path of straightness is an embodied burden. It might feel like additional work when you are regularly turned away from it, or no longer attuned to it, by virtue of a consistent stepping 'offline' into queerness. Working to orientate yourself toward heteronormativity when you are comfortable in a different way of being in the world is a physical effort. This might be exemplified through the stuttering or stumbling or even failure associated with being queer, as outlined by many of the theorists I draw on (Muñoz, 2009; Freeman, 2010; Halberstam, 2011). The moment we attempt a return to the norm, we lose our skill of adapting to it, or we were not able to stick to it to begin with (Halberstam, 2011; Freeman, 2010).

In my view, this visceral discordance is further exacerbated by being queer in a labour-centric world of hyperproductivity and capitalism, which often requires some level of participation in heteronormativity. The intertwining of these forces strains the

queer body. One example is when queers work in the world of customer service, as this provides a clear outline of the multilayered experience of stumbling inside the temporality of chrononormativity. Dowling analyzes her experiences working as a server for many years through an embodied account of affect theory (2012). She highlights the various ways that working in customer service requires a certain type of performance (the balancing act of the expectations from her managers, the level of personality expected of the server from the customers), with the reality that her paycheck is very much dependent on how smoothly she manages these elements. The ways in which her physical body is implicated in this work are numerous. Describing a trial shift at a new restaurant, she writes: "I feel the multiple gazes of management, of the male and of the guest, fall upon me and bring me into existence, validating my body and its affective resonances" (Dowling, 2012, p. 109). Her level of 'success' hinges upon how she manages her embodied actions under the scrutiny of a fast-paced business.

Much of these expectations as a server include performing femininity, through flirtation, and possessing awareness of the femininity of her affective labour. She provides sympathy and care in response to the demands of the customer, but as a strong server, she also works to cultivate a certain experience: "I perform for you, yet I am not simply on display. I create in you not just a state of mind, I create a feeling in your body, invoking or suppressing my own feelings in order to do so" (2012, p. 110). By detailing the horror of an immigration raid and the responding racism from her coworkers, she describes how she has had to eliminate her personal feelings to maintain a comfortable atmosphere for the clientele. She is also hyperaware of the realities of employment in the hospitality industry, especially under the demands of capitalism:

> I am also a proletarian subject, heroine of the precarious: I'm not tied to the job and lucky if I have a contract. I can be here today, somewhere else tomorrow, in a double-bind of freedom and dispensability that the day labourer knows all too well. (2012, p. 111).

If the server fails to provide comfort to the guest, efficiency to the managers, and comradery with co-workers, then the server is of no use to the company. Her performance is constructed to fulfill these criteria, because as she notes, she is there for the paycheck.

Of course, this is but one among many labour positions, but the point remains that from the need for survival, we must work with heteronormativity to keep our stumbling off-course to a minimum. Many of us comply as needed: we put on our "customer service voices," or we follow instructions when a boss wants something done. Not only do we have to provide a smiling face to a customer, but we must present as non-controversial, or perhaps even neutral. I consider here Muñoz's discussion in "Gesture, Ephemera, and Queer Feeling" (2009) where he writes of growing up queer as a constant policing of his own actions: "I was a spy in the house of gender normativity, and like any spy, I was extremely careful and worried that my cover would be blown" (2009, p. 68). My experience as a retail worker for many years and as a server in a family restaurant remind me that this was not an easy feat. When a fellow server makes a homophobic comment, the queer server is expected to shake this off and continue to bring the table of hetero-couples their desserts, and revel in their engagement celebration, or baby announcement, or job promotion.

I take up this theme of exhaustion because it can apply to mental, emotional, or physical exhaustion. It is extra labour for me to have to hide my emotional hurt when I

have to be not only flirtatious, but also to contort myself to move and act in appropriately feminine ways. Sometimes this movement or these actions seem so subtle, and for folks who are heterosexual and cis-gender, these actions might seem to them almost as 'second nature.' I think of how I have seen co-workers move so easily through the world, not giving it a second thought (of course, their experience might be different from my perception of their level of comfort).

I think of Ahmed again here, in her discussion of "brick walls" in *Living a Feminist Life*. She uses the imagery of the brick wall to invoke the physicality of barriers: "Walls allow us to think about how obstacles can be physical in the world, and yet how these obstacles are only obstacles for some bodies" (2017, p. 136). If straightness is a straight path, and if diverting from this path brings us up against walls, we can start to feel this in our bones. People who never deviate might not even realize that these barriers are there. Exhaustion in queer people can manifest itself in multiple ways. One avenue is to look at how social stigma and being in a minority further exacerbate mental illness in LGBTQIA folks, and that barriers (more walls) to seek help are often greater (Mink, Lindley, & Weinstein, 2014). Maybe some of us are better at coping than others. But as we spend a great deal of time trying to keep up with everyone and everything, how do we make time for a reprieve?

1.3.2 A Queer Sense of Belonging

Within *Cruising Utopia*, José Esteban Muñoz recalls a time when he ventured into a queer punk space and it offered him access to a network of "queer belongings" despite feeling as though he was starting to get too old to go to shows (2009, p. 109). Through an analysis of various photographs of underground punk and drag stages by his friend and

artist Kevin McCarty, Muñoz discusses the way the aesthetics of the images evoke anticipatory illumination. While he does not unpack the aesthetic and affective atmospheres of these queer belongings, I suspect that like the images from McCarty, the aesthetics of these queer punk spaces allowed for a queer sense of belonging. Although he does not necessarily linger on what he means by queer belongings, I borrow this phrase from him to denote moments that reconfigure our relationship to temporality. As physical age does not prevent his access to these networks, Muñoz becomes unburdened by this normative measurement of temporality. I am suggesting that moments of queer belonging are when we eschew chrononormativity so that we may spend time queerly. For a body consistently contorting itself to fit into societal expectations of normativity, this might be a moment to relax, untwist, and unwind.

Muñoz argues that spaces of queer art and aesthetics are indicative of queer futurity, as they invoke a temporality that is *not here* and *not now* (2009, p. 133). Because we necessarily exist in this constrained world, a queer utopia for Muñoz is impossible to achieve and will always be looming on the horizon. Nonetheless, these spaces offer tastes of this utopic promise through the valuation of emergence and becoming: "the critical work that utopian thought does, in its most concise and lucid formulation, allows us to see different worlds and realities. And this conjured reality instructs us that the 'here and now' is simply not enough" (Muñoz 2009, p. 171). My conceptualization of the temporality of art and aesthetics builds upon this, suggesting a moment otherwise that offers affective reprieve. Indeed, searching for a queer sense of belonging hinges upon the reality that the world as it exists in this material manifestation does not offer a smooth or easy fit for the queer subject.

However, I do not frame this affect within the realm of "futurity," necessarily, but as an affect that might be constituted through alternative ways of valuing temporalities. It simultaneously acknowledges the scourge of the normative world while providing a moment of respite, in which we might feel ourselves more at ease. It is through a queer sense of belonging that I develop my understanding of the affect of queer joy. I argue that these are interrelated affects. Like the theorists who discuss queer optimism and joy, I believe that it is something we can currently access. Queer joy can contain something like relishing laughter, absurdity and playfulness, while still containing the knowledge that the normative world is not enough for us.

As these affects are temporally contingent, they resist the rigidity and linearity of straight time. In this, they might echo the queer ephemerality described by Muñoz (2009). Through his discussions of queer performance, Muñoz demonstrates how the energy of a particular act can be transmuted through the post-performance discussions between friends, reviews, etc. This is the way queerness lingers: in moments that do not adhere to the strict and supposedly rational nature of normative frameworks (2009). Nor are these moments easily available to us, they depend upon an assemblage of particularities which are always shifting and fluid. As will become evident throughout this thesis, the moments I outline and attempt to grasp (while being aware of their ephemeral nature) resist the solidification of material evidence. I linger on moments that we might have through encountering and creating art, suggesting that these offer the potential to value time queerly, opening us to belonging and joy.

1.3.3 "Reading Into It:" Queer Aesthetics

To name certain aesthetic forms as queer and others as not-queer is antithetical to the fluidity of queer theory. However, throughout my thesis, my understanding of aesthetics as queer highlights the significance of relating-to and relating-with artistic forms. A conversation with David Getsy and Jennifer Doyle reveals their perspectives on queer *relations* as integral to queer aesthetic form (2013). The contingent context and history of the interlocutor are deeply relevant to the aesthetic experience. As Getsy writes on queer relations of forms in art: "any queer formal reading must itself be relational, particular, and contingent on its situation and context" (2013, p.255). As such, I suggest a queer reading of aesthetics incorporates an analysis that is contingent upon the bodies involved and the very nature of these shifting subjectivities that occurs over time and space. In this way, these readings necessarily incorporate the intricacies of affect theory and queer phenomenology.

Like Getsy, Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutical aesthetics offer the possibility for a queer aesthetic to be more about how a subject encounters, apprehends, or relates to the piece (Palmer, 2001). This also invokes a queer phenomenology, but for further discussion, I appeal to the work of phenomenologist, Helen Fielding. Fielding writes that our bodies may interact with "phenomenologically strong artworks" through repetition and familiarity, allowing us to attend to the immediacy of our worlds, prior to reflection and beyond the background to which they are often relegated (2015). Fielding argues that our social locations and experiences ground not only our reflection on further encounters, but that "there is a need to recognize the primacy of embodied perception that underlies cognition" (2015, p. 281). Even prior to our reflections upon the nature of the aesthetics

and the artworks in their contexts, our bodies perceive these elements in such a way that reflects our situated histories. Thus, I do not suggest that there are any number of specific techniques, materials, artistic methods, that are inherently 'queer.' Rather, it is a matter of the interaction between the subjects and objects that allow for queerness to become pertinent.

Part of this specific relationality reflects a concept of "reading into" something. Getsy and Doyle both discuss the value of queer formalisms as "reading into" a history of art that has often negated queer forms of knowledge, such as the idea that art can evoke sexuality or eroticism, or suggest that, according to Getsy "anything other than the obvious is 'Reading into' or hopeful projective fantasy" (2013, p. 59), to which Doyle responds:

> That complaint about 'reading into' usually displaces a conversation about desire with a complaint about identity—it mistakes the effort to expand on how pleasure works for a taxonomical project, turning the queer reading into the abject shadow of art history's most conservative projects. (2013, p. 59)

This idea of 'reading into' art works shows up throughout my work, particularly in chapter's two and five, where I draw on Freeman's notion of erotohistoriography. Through this practice of reading history, we look toward historical accounts through embodiment, pleasure, and pain. Thus, this practice accounts for affect and feeling, while also depending upon the circumstances of the interpreter.

Queer aesthetics, then, cannot be neatly categorized. Indeed, the messiness implicates the interpreting subject, blurring boundaries with the object being observed. This means that my interpretation of these aesthetics is in part where the queerness is

located, as it is dependent on my own subjective history. It might then seem that there are no queer aesthetics proper, rather a queer interpretation, queer interaction, a queer infusion, or as Matthew Isherwood suggests, a "queer sensibility" (2020, p. 231). My position takes seriously the 'reading into' so often dismissed as projection and wishful thinking. The nature of 'reading into' artworks shows up as I encounter all objects of analysis through my queer embodiment constituted through my own subjective history.

Despite my resistance to naming queer aesthetics proper, using the work of Jack Halberstam I regularly refer to the aesthetic of 'process' as queer. Halberstam discusses the value of in-betweenness as queer and as eschewing linear narratives that are reified through traditional aesthetics: "subcultural or avant-garde as opposed to mainstream configurations of the transgender look refuse to subordinate narratives of alternative embodiment to the rigidly conventional plot sequences of mainstream media" (Halberstam 2005, p. 108). Outside of traditional linear paths that invoke a teleology, Halberstam foregrounds the value existing in process. Regarding gender transition, Halberstam argues that the body that fails to inhabit the social expectations of 'woman' or 'man,' insofar as it encompasses traits considered to fall outside of these binary categories, has thus not achieved the expected 'end goal' of transitioning as constituted through repeated narratives of transness and transnormativity. As such, Halberstam makes space for the aesthetics associated with reformulating our relationship to expected gender trajectories:

> An aesthetic of turbulence…inscribes abrupt shifts in time and space directly onto the gender ambiguous body, and then offers that body to the gaze as a site of critical reinvention. Within this turbulence we can locate a transgender look, a mode of

> seeing and being seen that is not simply at odds with binary gender but that is a part of reorientation of the body in that space and time. (2005, p. 107)

A turbulent aesthetic would then open a consideration of process by valuing a trans body for its 'in-betweenness,' outside of the linear expectations of a 'before and after' narrative. A trans and gender-ambiguous body is then not only valued for what it might become, but as it is. Although Halberstam uses the language of 'trans,' I suggest that this is also queer insofar as I have defined queer as non-normative and resisting both rigidity and linearity. An aesthetic of constant flux and change without a particular end-goal, and outside of our trajectories, challenges normative notions even of gender transition (Crawford 2013, p. 566). Similarly, affect theorist, Ben Highmore, suggests that normative aesthetic value is attached to a teleology: "satisfaction [is] in the end form of a process, rather than in the messy informe of the ongoing-ness of process." (2013. p. 123). Thus, a queer aesthetic challenges normative constructions of this satisfaction, valuing the nature of process. Elements in flux and the value in process thematically recur throughout the various forms of art that make up this thesis.

1.4 Methodologies

My research methodologies throughout this project apply the theoretical frameworks that shape my understanding. As queer phenomenology, affect theory, and temporality provide a variety of queerly epistemological lenses through which to encounter art, I make sense of the following artistic experiences through these approaches. By doing this, I am employing what Jack Halberstam calls a "scavenger methodology" (1998, p. 13). Halberstam uses various methodologies that often seem at odds with one another to

"produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behavior" (1998, p. 13). Of this methodology, Hannah McCann writes that "Halberstam's work shifts between approaches, enabling a more experimental method that is resistant to expected results" (2016, p. 234). This queer methodological framework will engage various forms of knowledge that are often ignored or considered unimportant in traditional epistemological frameworks: the ephemeral, feelings and affect, and embodied knowing. All of which might yield messy and conflicting conclusions subject to change and reworking (or perhaps to no conclusions at all). Nonetheless, these methodologies are connected through a queer lens, with specific attention to embodiment and temporality.

My approach also utilises a Muñozian methodology which insists that queerness means possibility. Muñoz posits queerness as something we cannot quite reach in the present, as the material realities of the present are not enough. We ought to have the possibility of a brighter future on the horizon, something that is "not yet here" (2009, p. 26). Like Muñoz, I look to art and performance to find utopia and futurity. His analyses consider theories of performance, the aesthetic, the affective and the temporal, as he highlights the significance of valuing ephemerality as queer evidence. By drawing upon personal encounters with art and performance, Muñoz theorizes the possibilities of existing otherwise, of future worlds no longer hamstrung by the shortcomings of oppressive present realities. For Muñoz, capitalism, racism, and colonialism represent the present, and queerness offers hope and potential, as a form of "anticipatory illumination" (2009, p. 64). In certain present moments we can perceive glimpses of what an illuminating queer world could be in the future. Similarly, I draw from personal

experience and aesthetic analysis to further theorize the possibilities of queer joy and belonging.

I also acknowledge how I encounter particular artworks through an autoethnographic lens, which makes way for theories of queer phenomenology, affect theory, autotheory, autoethnography, and queer aesthetics/aesthetic experience. While the next chapter provides a literary analysis of the aesthetics of creative non-fiction, the following chapters detail my own encounters with some artworks and performances. Autoethnography developed as a sociological methodology that worked to attend to the researcher's subjectivity in their ethnographic work (Adams, Jones, & Ellis, 2015). Therefore, I can make use of this framework to provide descriptions of experiences of encountering possible moments of 'queer joy' or a 'sense of belonging.' This is not simply an exercise in poetic description, but an opportunity to unpack the threads of history, cultural location, and social location, through a queer and feminist lens, and through an acknowledgment of my own embodiment.

Autoethnography allows me to theorize my experiences in the *Camp: Notes on Fashion* exhibit at the Met in chapter three, as well as the concert in Brooklyn, NY, of queercore band *Hunx and His Punx* in chapter four. I entered both of those events as a queer subject without any intention of using these as objects for theoretical inquiry. My position as a researcher led me to begin to interpret these events later in ways that echoed my developing academic interests. I was neither taking notes, nor was I seeking objectivity or trying to distance myself from the event, so that, as Adam, et. al write: "with autoethnography, we use our experience to engage ourselves, others, culture (s), politics, and social research" (2015, p.1). An autoethnographic method allows me to use

these experiences in ways that are meaningful for my research, regardless of whether I sought to do so. I can theorize about the meanings of the experiences, while acknowledging my limited memory, lens, and body through which I came upon these objects. Because it asserts critical self-reflection, autoethnographic practice also requires me to attend to the areas to which I cannot speak fully. I can interpret my interactions with these specific moments, while leaving them open to tensions and unanswered questions. Autoethnographic stories will allow me to describe these experiences and the details I found resonant, while opening various threads for further analysis, such as the aesthetic and the temporal, and ideas of embodiment.

Throughout the thesis, I use various forms of queer aesthetic analysis and queer aesthetic experiences as methodologies for gaining insight into the questions I ask. As mentioned, aesthetic analysis, for my purposes, will not be limited to aesthetic form as it is traditionally construed, but will be contextually situated. For example, I will use these analyses as I move throughout the hot-pink halls of the Met Exhibit, only to find Oscar Wilde staring back at me irreverently. I will unpack the significance of a do-it-yourself (DIY), or "trashy" aesthetics embodied by the members of *Hunx and his Punx*, not only in terms of what this means for style and how this can affect the participant/viewer, but also for its cultural and temporal significance as a form of queer art. By doing aesthetic analyses through a queer lens, we can observe the significance of "stick-and-poke" or DIY tattooing for queer identity, to further hypothesize the connections between queer belongings. I will also consider the artistic elements of writer and artist T Flesichmann's autotheoretical accounts of their art pieces and how they use poetic writing to elicit affect. I also consider how their descriptions of their own sculptures and photographs

make them significant for fostering queer joy. These methods allow me to uncover the aesthetics that contribute to an embodied experience that evokes anti-capitalism and queer timelines, providing a rich background for creating queer joy and belonging. Attention to art and aesthetics in these ways dialogues directly with my phenomenological framework, underlining that while it is a scavenger methodology, all elements are deeply intertwined. As I encountered art pieces, my body perceived these pieces in such a way that grounded any affective experience and subsequent theoretical reflection. Attention to embodied histories through a queer phenomenological lens alongside theories of aesthetics has the potential to elucidate the affective experiences of 'joy' and 'belonging' in the immediate encounter.

1.5 Chapter Summaries

Given this groundwork, I search for ways queers create a sense of 'queer joy' in a world "unhappy" with queerness (Ahmed, 2010), and 'belonging' in a world that continues to foster ubiquitous heteronormativity. Chapter two will detail and analyze excerpts from the creative nonfiction essay by T Fleischmann in which they describe a moment of "deadly serious joy" among other affective events (2019, p. 118). My critical reading will contextualize these moments within the purview of the book as written by a queer trans artist and academic. Fleischmann, I argue, is situated within the confines of the oppressive systems detailed in this introduction, but they still find a way to foster these glimmers of joy and belonging. With attention to art, queer aesthetics, and embodied affect, I will show how these components contain the potential to create a new temporality conducive to queer belonging and joy. My analysis draws upon

Fleischmann's encounters with artworks from late queer Latinx artist Félix González-Torres and their descriptions of creating artworks with their friend and collaborator, Benjy Russell. Throughout these explorations, I focus on the unique intersections of autotheory, erotohistoriography and ingesting art, digressions, excess, and colour, alongside the affective potential of the artworks to stick to the reader.

Chapter three opens with an autoethnographical description of a personal encounter within a deeply commercial art space. I explore how this was a moment of queer belonging for myself as a queer subject. In 2019, the Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art curated an exhibit titled *Camp: Notes on Fashion* that came on the heels of the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall Riots. I explore how the aesthetics and curation of this exhibit reconstructed my subjective relationship to time, offering the queer interloper the possibility of 'belonging'. Particularly, I analyse queer camp, failures, and notions of elsewhere as they coalesce with iconic queer figures. However, as I begin to unpack this moment, I recognize the shortcomings of the exhibit as an exclusive space. I challenge the exploration of "Camp" that does not centre or prioritize Black queer and trans artists or queer and trans People of Colour. I argue, then, that though this might be a moment of temporal transformation, it is not necessarily sufficient for the complexity of queer joy. Yet such an exhibit can still offer glimmers of potential joy and belonging, so rather than eschewing the exhibit's monetization and its popularity in its entirety, I argue that it can still provide a source of belonging for many queers. As I further reflect on this experience through a Queer of Colour lens, I enrich its meaning through an affective recognition of what is missing.

By providing another autoethnographic retelling of an experience at a queercore concert, I use chapter four to highlight how the queer aesthetics of live performances also contain the potential to foster queer belonging and joy. Musician and multi-media artist, Seth Bogart, leads queercore band *Hunx and His Punx*. During the summer of 2019, they commenced a US tour with a sold-out show in Brooklyn. As a member of this audience, I recall the moments that resonated for me and unpack their affective significance. I suggest that this art contains a different set of aesthetics yet fostered a similar affect as that of the exhibit at the Met, and thus provided a new timeline for queer joy and belonging. I begin with a brief overview of queercore, a movement of queer punk music and artists, and move through the unique assemblage of aesthetics that constitute this time and space. Namely, I focus on the "liveness" of performance as containing a multitude of bodies through which performers and participant/audience members interact, alongside the anti-capitalist DIY aesthetic of queercore, the body language and a more accessible aesthetic that is intentionally anti-capitalist. I analyse the embodiment and performance of Bogart himself as campy and effeminate, and the embodiment of celebrated bassist, Shannon Shaw, as a fat, powerful presence.

The title of chapter five is taken from the lyrics of a song written and performed by queer musician, Ellen Kempner, known as Palehound, expressing their need for a "stick-and-poke" tattoo. I expand upon and explore this art-form as a uniquely queer aesthetic with the potential for queer joy and belonging. Stick-and-poke tattoos, I suggest, seep into accounts of queer communities and belongings through various forms of art. I demonstrate how they show up in Fleischmann's work, the song by Palehound, and a recently published anthology showcasing queer tattooing. Additionally, I briefly discuss

how I have personally encountered the art form. I situate stick-and-pokes within a nebulous history that resists distillation, but I nonetheless attempt to account for its phenomenological pathway insofar as it is a method that is often practiced by queer people. Furthermore, I explicate some of its unique aesthetic forms which I argue are queer in that they foster a new sense of temporality and thus joy and belonging. Attending to its queerness as "embodying art" and "bad art," I show how this practice subverts the commercialization of tattooing and how it can foster connection with other queer people. Throughout this chapter, I highlight the value to be found in all artistic practices and creativity where queer people work to find joy and belonging in their everyday existence.

Chapter 2

2 "Deadly Serious Joy" at a Time like This[1]

On a short trip to New York City in the summer of 2019, my companion and I explored a queer activist bookstore. The recent literary trend of 'autotheory' has offered many queer writers an opportunity to explore the boundaries between theory and aesthetic form; as a queer scholar researching time and embodiment, I was immediately drawn to T Fleischmann's *Time is the Thing a Body Moves Through* (2019). My engagement with this book produced a sense of affective meaning and belonging, impressing itself upon me as I read. This chapter explores how Fleischmann, as a creative non-fiction writer, exemplifies the affect of a *queer sense of belonging* throughout their description of encountering a work of art created by the late queer artist, Félix González-Torres. This sense of belonging is an affect that is co-created through the intertwining elements of queer aesthetics and the contingent affective history of the encountering subject. The unique nature of this queer affect is that it has the capacity to be transmitted in and through other queer bodies, making it what I call a 'sticky affect,' borrowing from Sara Ahmed's conception of emotions as "sticky" (2014, p. 91).

Following this, I argue that Fleischmann demonstrates a *queer joy*: a complex affect that has the capacity to stick to queer bodies that can be generated through various forms of queer art. Particularly, this queer joy is rendered by aesthetic forms that challenge normative constructions of temporality. Through an analysis of excerpts of

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[1] This chapter contains extended and revised sections from a paper published in *The Polish Journal of Aesthetics,* entitled "Sticky Aesthetics, sticky affect: Connecting through queer art" (Keating, 2021).

Fleischmann's work, I unravel the ways art contributes to moments where Fleischmann and their friend value and *feel* a "deadly serious joy" (2018, p. 118). My position suggests that in virtue of existing in the contemporary dominant social order of the late 2010s and early 2020s, queer bodies create their own worlds through various aesthetic and artistic forms to foster belonging. These worlds have the capacity to be formulated by *and* to be conducive to queer joy. Queer joy, I argue, does not merely connote a 'happiness' within North American hegemonic social systems. Rather, it is an affect hinging upon the knowledge apprehended through queer embodied discordance that this world is not conducive to the comfort of 'deviating' subjects. Queer individuals, like all bodies under a capitalist, heterosexist, racist, ableist, transphobic, colonial patriarchy, are subject to having to adhere to these systems at some level for mere survival. Queer communities create belonging and joy for themselves *in spite of* and *outside of* the dominant systemic structures that do not facilitate these affects. Insofar as these affects are fostered through art and aesthetics, I conclude by gesturing to ways art is significant for queer connection and community.

2.1 Fleischmann, Autotheory, and Aesthetic Narration

The term "autotheory" is often attributed to Maggie Nelson who uses it to describe her work *The Argonauts* (Wiegman, 2020, p. 1; Nelson, 2015). In this book, Nelson blends creative non-fiction and autobiographical snippets with academic theory, making sense of her experiences through these modes of knowledge creation (Wiegman, 2020, p. 1; Nelson, 2015). Fleischmann's book is written in a similar vein to Nelson's *The Argonauts*, as Fleischmann narrates their encounters with art and creation of art through

both a creative and implicitly theoretical lens. Autotheory combines the terms "autobiography" and "theory" while acknowledging the instability of both categories (Wiegman 2020, p. 3), meaning that autotheoretical work can take on many forms. This instability makes it difficult, or impossible, to pin it down (Wiegman, 2020, p. 7). Yet many commentators discuss its ability to value and produce knowledge through personal experience while being playful in its presentation and paying attention to the aesthetic value of the art of writing (Wiegman 2020, p.6). Autotheory also works in ways that are explicitly feminist as it serves to acknowledge personal experiences as inseparable from the political. Personal stories are told through a theoretical lens and, as I suggest via Fleischmann, create an affective bond through aesthetic form and technique. The theory embedded within Fleischmann's text is woven throughout with careful subtlety. It is not always overtly named, but it seeps through their writing, with some identifiable reference to Leo Bersani, Samuel Delaney, and hints of a Muñozian utopia (2019). These frameworks contribute to how Fleischmann unravels their lived moments as they are documented via prose.

I acknowledge how I am only aware of Fleischmann's *narration* or representation of their experiences of encountering and creating art. Alongside the aesthetics of the art detailed in the book, I suggest Flesichmann's text employs similar aesthetic forms. Thus, my analysis is layered. The layers, however, are indistinct. I first consider Fleischmann's own retelling of their experiences as it is offered, considering it to be a version of the truth, notably *their* version of the truth. Elsewhere, Fleischmann has argued that "bending truths" is historically used as a tool for marginalized voices (2013, p. 46). "Bending truths" challenges traditional constructions of fact and fiction that are deeply

Westernized, colonial and that have been utilized to disavow and invalidate experiences of marginalized folks. Fleischmann values the knowledge offered through these stories whose narratives offer perspectives that bleed between truths and untruths. Unlike a Trumpian model of 'fake news' that is used to delegitimize media criticisms against those in power (Egelhofer & Lecheler, 2019), for Fleischmann "the role of knowledge is not so much to inform, but to *encourage exploration*, especially when that exploration leads us further into the place we call the margins" (2013, p. 48). As I consider how Fleischmann's stories are presented in their book, I see their transmission of their experience as truthful to the extent that it presents their experience of events in a way that opens possibilities for further interpretation from the reader. Given the instability of autotheory, truth and fiction become deliberately entangled. How I encounter this information, via Fleischmann's book, is pertinent. I will reflect on their retelling of events with this in mind, settling myself in the cracks they have created to allow for my own further exploration.

As the introduction to this thesis project explores how queer aesthetics means acknowledging *how* we *interpret* meaning and experiences of art, and Fleischmann transmits their experiences through art, my own subjectivity is relevant to my analysis of this work. I must reflect upon how my own subjective embodiment has been affected through a phenomenological methodology. The very nature of how I am orientated is what led to the encounter with the book itself: I mention how I was on a short trip to New York City and my attention was grabbed by the title that spoke directly to my research interests. Beyond my research interests, my very location was mediated by my embodied history of affective impressions. I work to incorporate and unpack this positionality when

I discuss the nature of Fleischmann's affective moments as being "sticky," particularly to a queer reader. While I cannot do so objectively, I can use this to acknowledge my arguments are partial and subjective, meaning that there is room for these positions to shift and change.

2.2 Fleischmann Encounters Art and a *Queer Sense of Belonging*

Fleischmann details their encounters with the late González-Torres's 'candy spill' sculpture, *Untitled (A Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* within the first ten pages of their work. Displayed posthumously, the sculpture consists of a pile of colourfully wrapped candy in the corner of an art gallery, weighed out to equal that of González-Torres' long-term partner, Ross Laycock, who died from AIDS in the nineties. Arriving at the work with this knowledge, Fleischmann describes picking up a piece of candy with yellow foil:

> I placed it in my mouth./I sucked at the candy as I continued to look at the pile, slightly diminished./I felt for a moment an acute sense of loss and beauty, each indistinguishable from the other./The candy was very sweet, and it was melting. (2019, p. 4)

The hard candies are replaced by gallery staff so that they will always add up to Laycock's weight. Fleischmann follows the motif of hard candies throughout this section of the text, both prior to and following this visit. A pile of candies wrapped in blue foil gathers around a lamp in a room they shared with their friend and complicated lover, Simon. Simon throws a couple of these candies into Fleischmann's purse, "little shards that will begin to melt in the heat of the subway" (2019, p. 6). Fleischmann also reflects

upon their connections with González-Torres, alongside lamenting their recent draw to New York City. This draw is nostalgic, "because of what [New York] had been" (2019, p. 6), reflecting on the queer contours of the city as they develop their prose. They incite glimmers of a queer past and present, noting the spaces in which these intersect.

Fleischmann's narration of these experiences exemplifies how the aesthetics of the sculpture have had an affective impact on their embodiment. Readers of Fleischmann's essay share in their reflections of the work. I take the following excerpt to be particularly poignant:

> I experienced the act of removing the piece of candy, with its overt ritualization, as an act that both grounded me and pushed me further into an imaginative space./The tactility of unwrapping the paper and tasting the melting sugar situated me in my body, while the fact of González-Torres's romance with Ross removed me from my experience./I know, however, that I was only in my own memories./My losses are squarely different than his,/as none of our losses are the same./His work moves between fact and imagination, the object and the memory, to open a new space:/from me, to something that exists beyond that limit./Like I was only a boundary before, and now I can move again—/pushing through a crowd until I come out the other side, and the air opens up and I breathe. (2019, p. 8)

I suggest that this recreation of the event is indicative of a queer sense of belonging: a moment of reprieve from a hetero- and chrononormative world. The imagery evokes a sense of freedom made available to Fleischmann through their encounter with the piece.

The air opening up becomes a moment to unbind from the confines of a world that does not belong to queer bodies. The queer aesthetic forms of this piece reconfigure Fleischmann's relationship to normative time, and through this, Fleischmann seems to experience a level of comfort and freedom not regularly available to them outside of their encounter with this work.

2.2.1 Sticky Affect

As my approach to reading Fleischmann considers affective encounters, I bring forth Sara Ahmed's *The Cultural Politics of Emotion,* (2014). Ahmed's referencing of "emotions" parallels my own 'affect.' As she writes: "I explore how emotions work to shape the 'surfaces' of individual and collective bodies. Bodies take the shape of the very contact they have with objects and others" (2014, p. 1). The introduction to this thesis discusses how subjects and objects have the capacity to interact and impress upon one another under the heading of 'affect.' Thus, I interpret Ahmed's 'emotions' in a similar way, particularly as she explores the nature of "disgust" and "sticky" emotions. Ahmed follows the affective nature of disgust as it is applied to and sticks to certain objects, and subsequently spreads throughout bodies that interconnect and interrelate. As one object elicits a level of disgust in our bodies through our encounter with it, we then attach "disgust" onto the object itself. Other objects that encounter the disgusting object then risk having that disgust stick. I cautiously take up this idea through a notion of a queer sense of belonging that can stick to queer aesthetic forms. Despite not referring to the emotion of disgust, I suggest that affect can stick to queer art similarly to how disgust can stick to objects. According to Ahmed, "stickiness involves a form of relationality, or a 'withness', in which the elements that are 'with' get bound together" (2014, p. 91), this

"withness" depends upon our orientations to certain objects, which depends upon a body's affective history (2014, p. 87). I recognize there is a risk in using a theory developed through a *normatively* negative emotion; queerness, as I have shown, works to renounce the normative. Ahmed is suggesting that as something continues to get associated with disgust, the more *likely* that thing is to become associated with that emotion of disgust. Similarly, I suggest that as the reader of *Time is the Thing* is sharing in Fleischmann's interpretation of art, and Fleischmann imbues these encounters with a particular affect, this affect then might stick to the art as it goes through levels of interpretation: from the piece itself, through Fleischmann's experience, to their writing of that experience, to then affecting the reader.

The reader can then feel this affect when encountering the art through the words offered by Fleischmann. Fleischmann then brings this sticky affect into the proximity of the queer reader through their encounter with the González-Torres piece and onto the page, blurring boundaries between the work of art, Fleischmann's interpretation, and the reader's experience. In order to explore this messy and dialogical relationship that blurs the boundaries of objects, I first consider the ways the sculpture generates the affect of a queer sense of belonging through its aesthetic forms. Why does this affect stick to such a piece and then become transferred to the page? I suggest this is in large part due to the nature of queer aesthetic encounters.

2.2.2 Ingesting Art: An *Erotohistoriographic* Encounter

In *Relational Aesthetics,* Curator Nicolas Bourriaud claims that González-Torres's work leads the way for a trend of "inter-subjectivity" and its many meanings in art seen throughout the 1990s (2002, p. 51). González-Torres's works utilize aesthetics that

implicate the viewers as participants. Bourriaud defines “relational aesthetics” as an “aesthetic theory consisting in judging artworks on the basis of the inter-human relations which they represent, produce or prompt” (2002, p 112). González-Torres was influential through manifesting aesthetic forms that diverged from a traditional materialization, towards a valuation of process, of artistic meanings to be made within the context of the interacting bodies and/or the future participants. Bourriaud writes that “the immateriality of nineties’ art displays and explores the process that leads to objects and meanings. The object is just a ‘happy ending’ to the exhibition process…it does not represent the logical end of the work, but an event” (2002, pp. 53-54). Through the relative material simplicity of *Untitled (A Portrait of Ross in L.*A), González-Torres focuses our attention on the meaning that is created through viewers’ participation, which is particular and constituted in and through our social contexts. While this also might mean accounting for the context in which the work was initially conceived, as Fleischmann does, it also must attend to its proliferation in later (or future) iterations. As such, Bourriaud writes that art incorporating a relational aesthetic by requiring the participation of the viewer, such as González-Torres’s, “encompasses in the working process the presence of the micro-community which will accommodate it. A work thus creates, within its method of production and then at the moment of its exhibition, a momentary grouping of participating viewers” (2002, p. 58). As participants interrelate spatially and temporally with the piece of work, there is an embodied connection. Through the nature of its subsequent incarnations, this micro-community has the capacity to develop and jump across and through a linear temporality. I will show how this theme becomes even more salient as I reveal not only this work’s affective impact beyond Fleischmann’s encounter,

but also how through its ‘process’ of ingestion, participants might continue to connect within a similar timeline.

Fleischmann’s description of ingesting the piece of candy from the González-Torres sculpture, foregrounds Elizabeth Freeman’s notion of *erotohistoriography*. Freeman describes erotohistoriography as a way to reconceive historical moments while attending to bodily sensations through pain and pleasure (2010). As attention to the body has often been ignored or written out of history, the sensate experience of a past can be held in the present. Erotohistoriography does not necessitate a historical turn to the past, but “[treats] the present itself as hybrid. It uses the body as a tool to effect, figure, or perform that encounter” (2010, pp. 95-96). Freeman argues that a queer time could be different from a chrononormative time as it can provide a counter-historiography in feeling history with an embodied complexity. Whereas traditional historiography has evaded the sensual, the embodied, and the pleasures of the past, “queer social practices” invoke an experience of a history that “is not only what hurts but what arouses, kindles, whets, or itches” (2010, p. 117). This reflects a queer “reading into” of artworks as offered by queer artistic theorists, David Getsy and Jennifer Doyle (2013). Likewise, the ingestion of the hard candy through the González-Torres sculpture challenges the boundaries of a past and present embodiment by requiring the participation of a contemporary subject. The candy, as representing the body of González-Torres’s lover, then becomes incorporated into the lives and bodies of the participants, diffusing beyond the origin of the piece as they continue to move through their respective worlds. The sugar of the candy quite literally melts onto the subjects’ tongues, seeping through their digestive systems, and provides caloric energy to their movements. Indeed, Freeman’s

erotohistoriography also brings forth “Torok’s notion of incorporation, of literally consuming an object that partakes of the lost body and thereby preserving it” (2010, p. 120). This also echoes the Catholic practice of communion, a point upon which I later expand.

Jack Pryor, in utilizing Freeman’s erotohistoriography, argues that live performance can summon these moments of ‘insemination’ (2017). This connects the audience and performer in a queer ‘time slip’ that in Pryor’s view also challenges chrononormativity. In conjuring affective moments, queer performance artist, Peggy Shaw, transmits a connection outside of a traditional notion of temporality. Pryor writes:

> To touch, transmit, and inseminate without making contact is not only ontologically performative, as Taylor asserts, it is quintessentially queer. As nonbiological reproduction, it subverts the heterocapitalist mandate that situates the production of surplus capital and nuclear families as the nationalist project. (2017, p. 70)

Like Shaw, González-Torres has physically given over the embodiment of his partner, Ross, to future generations through a queer seepage, beyond a chrononormative temporal expectation dependent upon heterosexual reproduction. The context of the AIDS epidemic during the 1980s and 1990s produced queer temporal theorists who argued against futurity as gay men were faced with a diagnosis of death (Edelman, 2013). This sculpture, then, transmits Laycock’s embodiment into a future outside of heteronormative temporality. In doing so, queer bodies connect in a different, queer time. In a refusal of traditional procreation, a queer body, that of Laycock, is ingested by the encountering subject, implicating the subject in a deviation away from linear chrononormativity.

Indeed, Daniel Santiago Sáenz Tabares uses this particular González-Torres work to argue for a "queer hagiography" by drawing a connection between the participant taking a piece of candy representative of Ross, and the Catholic tradition of receiving and ingesting the eucharist representative of Christ. He writes that "the Eucharist is the moment when God makes community with the believer…when the body of Christ enters the body of the believer and thus the body politic" (2018, p. 138). For Tabares, as the candy is representative of Ross and the ephemerality of the body dying from HIV/AIDS, the ingestion is the honouring of these bodies[2] alongside disseminating the political message of the government's failure to act during the HIV/AIDS epidemic. A "queer hagriography," for Tabares, queers normative saint status by denoting sainthood because of a queer's failures to adhere to the dominant social order. Tabares does not attempt to rid queer icons of their queerness in order to fit them into a homophobic tradition but suggests commemorating them in a way that "centres their sexual and political dissent within the confines of religious economies" (2018, p. 136). This echoes a tradition of making martyrs of gay men who died of HIV/AIDS through queer theorists such as David Halperin, and as Tabares later argues "this queer Eucharist brings about possibilities for the restructuring of society…[it] represents the sacrificial blood and body of those who died during the plague. We honour their memory, we mourn their deaths, and we acknowledge their sacrifice in community" (2018, p. 139) Thus queers and participants cast aside the generations of homophobia in Christianity to honour queer martyrs. This makes a space for a community of queers in a tradition that has historically

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[2] The act of ingesting bodies cast as other, diseased, and dying, is also a way to centre the abject and its possibilities to create fractures in normative systems and orders – a point to which I later return in this chapter.

(and continually) marginalized queerness and treated HIV/AIDS as if it was righteous punishment. Existing in this queered community means formulating a new time where queers are the saints and martyrs, where together we participate in disseminating their message and honouring their bodies.

In conjunction with the ingestion of the candy that is Ross's body, the candy, for Fleischmann impresses upon them a sweetness, a pleasurable feeling. This pleasure, however, is not without complexity: possibly akin to what González-Torres felt in the presence of their partner who was given a terminal diagnosis. Along with bodily incorporation, pleasure is conducive to the embodiment of a historiography. Freeman writes that there is the "very queer possibility that encounters with history are bodily encounters, and even that they have a revivifying and pleasurable effect" (2010, p. l15). Fleischmann's pleasure in eating the candy is also attached to a deep melancholy, not only in the representation of a diminishing body, but in Fleischmann's incompossible feelings that are present throughout their written reflection: feelings that within a binary logic, should be at odds with one another, but exist simultaneously. They describe feeling both "loss" and "beauty" in such a way that they become indistinguishable from one another. This complex feeling, I suggest, is conducive to a queer sense of belonging that sticks to the sculpture and to Fleischmann's reinterpretation.

While the pleasure grounds them through ingestion, incorporating embodiment, Fleischmann also could become inculcated with the public's complicity of the loss of Gonzalez- Torres's partner due to AIDS (Tabares, 2018; Isherwood 2020). Pryor's notion of 'time slips' through live performance are illuminating here, as a chrononormative timeline does not allow for time to be 'spent' on dallying in emotions that have yet to be

healed or validated by hegemonic power structures (2017, p. 32). For example, queer trauma at the hands of a heteronormatively systemic world is not given the 'time' to be seen, heard, or healed within the forward march of a heteronormative clock (Pryor 2017). Nonetheless, Pryor also uses art to expose the fractures through which these feelings have been oozing. Pryor writes that:

> time slips are moments in live performance in which normative conceptions of time fail, or fall away, and the spectator or slip reveals a previously unseen aspect of either the past, present or future (while complicating the presumably linear relationship among and between each). (2017, p. 9)

The moment that Fleischmann takes to ingest the sweetness of the candy, which represents Ross, is not merely a tactile grounding of pleasure, but a moment to dwell in the sadness. Thus, my conceptualization of a queer sense of belonging also makes room for feelings not often associated with ease or comfort. I believe that they elicit an unbinding from bodily discordance in that queer bodies no longer have to contort themselves to ignore and move beyond their trauma in a way that adheres to a chrononormative model, where they can feel reprieve. This moment, for Fleischmann, was indeed also a 'time slip,' in that the sadness and beauty of González-Torres's time with Ross can be seen and ultimately felt and incorporated into the bodies of others. In a world where queer tragedy is often sidelined, the moment to dwell in a sadness accompanied by pleasure and love is a queer moment indeed.

The hard candy used to create this sculpture is not extraordinary, but rather a fairly accessible, everyday material. In this section of Fleischmann's narrative, it keeps

cropping up, even outside of the art encounter (2019, pp. 4-6). This inclusion of the object outside of the curated sculpture gestures to the glimmers of ephemeral queerness in the everyday object of a hard candy beyond the piece of art. Isherwood argues that because a queer sensibility can orientate queer bodies toward seeing the queerness in the everyday, it "must detect queer desire in objects and situations that might not be obvious to others" (2020, 236). Indeed, for Isherwood this is reflective of a Muñozian ephemeral knowing: "a queer aesthetic sensibility," he writes, "seems familiar to the practice of gay cruising and its reliance on one's capacity to detect ephemeral traces in queer possibility" (2020, 235). Fleischmann's references to candy outside of the encounter with the sculpture, then, imply a connection to a queerness in the everyday object: a queerness perhaps unavailable to those not searching for it. This might be demonstrative of Ahmed's analysis of the uses of objects. In *What's the Use?* Ahmed writes that "queer uses, when things are used for purposes other than the ones for which they were intended, still reference the qualities of things; queer uses may linger on those qualities rendering them all the more lively" (2019, 26). González-Torres's usage of hard candy becomes ever-more salient in its altering of the purposes of an everyday object; candy takes to a different life — one that stays with its consumers, the participants of the sculpture and perhaps Fleischmann — and thus it gestures towards a queer possibility (Muñoz 2009; Isherwood 2020).

Ben Highmore also makes a case for the aesthetics of the everyday object as being affectively significant in its messiness and "sticky entanglements" (2010, p. 119). In his article, "Bitter After Taste: Affect, Food, and Social Aesthetics," Highmore complicates the distinction between embodied apprehensions:

> The interlacing of sensual, physical experience (here, the insistent reference to the haptic realm—touch, feel, move) with the passionate intensities of love, say, or bitterness, makes it hard to imagine untangling them, allotting them to discrete categories in terms of their physicality or the ideational existence. (2010, p. 120)

However, to acknowledge that everyday objects can be multiple, messy, and sticky, we must also acknowledge how subjectivity and one's subjective history of affect are relevant in our encounter with art. Fleischmann points to this in their narration regarding the piece: "I know, however, that I was only in my own memories./My losses are squarely different than his,/as none of our losses are the same" (2019, 9). As Highmore suggests, it is not impossible to connect a sense of a beautiful sweetness with a positive affect beyond the taste itself. However, as Highmore also reflects, moments of "cultural experience" are "densely woven entanglement[s] of all these aspects…sticky entanglements of substances and feelings, of matter and affect are central to our contact with the world" (2010, 119). Fleischmann's encounter with the sculpture made from an everyday object is not only queer in its use, but it also ties them to a tangled web of feelings that do not simply get resolved. Instead, they are attuned to a bodily sensation that they see and feel in other spaces, which is shown throughout their prose. The messiness of the everyday in its queer use sticks to Fleischmann.

Through these queer aesthetic interpretations of the piece and Fleischmann's rendition of their encounter, I have argued that they felt a sense of 'queer belonging'. Despite González-Torres's and Ross's deaths, Fleischmann embodies them through the act of participating in the piece. This work opens Fleischmann up to a temporal structure

that recognizes pleasurable embodiment and validates queer loss. It also has the capacity to cultivate the queer into the messiness of the everyday. In a trans and queer body, Fleischmann is then able to breathe, and perhaps experiences an affect of belonging outside of a heteronormative framework.

2.2.3 Sticking to the Reader

I consider again the nature and relevance of autotheory and how this plays a role in the affective apprehension of art for the reader. Fleischmann's book incorporates creative elements. I have addressed Fleischmann's own retelling of their experience, valuing it as a version of Fleischmann's truth. I cannot, however, disentangle my own subjectivity as I encounter this piece of work as art in itself. It is this within this messiness that things begin to get sticky.

Not only is Fleischmann encountering González-Torres, but I am encountering Fleischmann's rendition of their encounter. I am approaching and co-creating meaning in an artistic rendering of their own experience. I have access to their feelings for the piece *and* I encounter the feelings, as they are aesthetically presented, with my own non-neutral embodiment. Fleischmann's words become a unique conduit into the experience of the sculpture that can affectively engage the reader. This affect might be amplified specifically for the reader who regularly feels an embodied discordance, and perhaps, even unknowingly, is open to unbinding through a queer sense of belonging. Just as Fleischmann's own embodiment orientated them to a queer aesthetic sensibility (Isherwood 2020), the reader of their essay comes to the piece with their own historical subjective experiences. Fleischmann's narration, theoretical inquiries and analyses are offered to the reader in what I suggest is queerly affective prose. As autotheory tends to

oscillate between narrative that stretches the truth and fact (Weigman 2020), it might be that "truth" and "fiction" become entangled. Thus, Fleischmann argues that there is value in considering these stories whose narratives offer perspectives that bleed between truths and untruths in creative writing. The transmission of their experience is truthful as it presents their experience of the events in a way that opens possibilities for further interpretation from the reader. I began my writing by acknowledging what led me to read Fleischmann in the first place: much of this was contingent upon my queer scholarly pursuits. Indeed, this may mean that the words affect me in a way that is open to particular *feelings* that others in different circumstances might not be privy to. Their stylistic choices, thus, let me slip comfortably into fissures of queer belonging that they have created. Fleischmann, González-Torres and I create meaning together, as queer affect becomes transmitted through the page, sticking to Fleischmann's own art.

I suggest that the writing recalls similar themes of queer aesthetic relations and forms of sculpture in a way that reapplies this meaning, further allowing the affect to stick. Fleischmann's text lingers, circles, dawdles, and eludes any notion of linear temporality. Paragraphs of thick description are broken by poetic, stanza-like lines of reflection of other times, or tangential themes, allowing the reader to take a moment and to indulge in perhaps a different thread of Fleischmann's thought. These moments exemplify a queer timeline. Rather than adhere to chrononormative linearity that asserts a forward-facing continuous march, Fleischmann takes time to dally and tarry (Muñoz 2009, Freeman 2010). This also makes room for Pryor's "time slip" (2017). The reader is given a new time to join Fleischmann in their emotive and affective reflections. Indeed, many of the incorporations of poetic accounts demand an attention to one's embodiment,

as Fleischmann's descriptions ground them in their trans body. Highmore characterizes bodily experiences of aesthetic modes as being difficult to disentangle from one another. Thus, the reader has the capacity to *feel* and be affected by Fleischmann's experiences alongside them. A queer reader can open themselves up to the impressions of the candy, for example, and the space in which Fleischmann can finally breathe; we are drawn into it with complex pleasure and sadness, and we connect to them and to González-Torres and Ross Laycock. I am suggesting that residues of this queer sense of belonging stick to me, as I allow it to impress upon my queer body. This is not to say that a non-queer identifying reader would not have an affective experience. But, as Ahmed writes "stickiness depends on the histories of contact that have already impressed upon the surface of the object" (2014, p. 90). Thus, insofar as queer bodies might be open and orientated to these experiences (Ahmed 2006b; Isherwood 2020), the boundaries of these bodies and objects become blurred, in contrast to an encountering subject that might be closed off, perhaps hardened, or at the very least not "reading into" the aesthetics for deeper, queer meaning (Doyle & Getsy 2013).

2.3 Important Digressions: Fleischmann Creates Art and *Queer Joy*

Art, as I have shown, can cultivate a queer sense of belonging. I also argue that art has the capacity simultaneously to foster an affect I will call *queer joy.* These affects often interrelate with one another in a dialogical and entangled relationship. The impetus to incorporate these moments from Fleischmann's writings came from my own personal enjoyment of reading these snippets and descriptions. They seem to transfer their joy onto

the page in an affective manner that is queer and sticky, much like queer belonging. Importantly, however, Fleischmann describes feeling joy in a way that seems novel to queerness, as they write: “I know how painful it is to be defined by something so large that it seems to swallow every bit of who you are./That’s why feeling joy is so revolutionary” (2019, p. 107). This sentiment predates and echoes the motivations of many contemporary theorists exploring the concept of queer joy. This section, however, details my own understanding of the concept as I encountered it through Fleischman’s text. Joy, in this sense, differs from being a “happy queer” as Ahmed describes in *The Promise of Happiness*; wherein a dominant social order is not built for queer bodies, making an attempt at “happiness” a concession to the straight path (2010). Rather, queer joy is an affect that hinges upon the acknowledgment of a dominant social order that is not built for queer bodies. In this section, I outline and analyze moments in Fleischmann’s text that indicate they are embodying a “deadly serious joy” (2019, p. 118). This experience is found and created through their attention to art because of the temporal possibility available through the process of art creation. The nature of art and aesthetics allows for the possibility of challenging the use of objects in a way that acknowledges and deconstructs capitalist constraints. Queer aesthetic forms, as I have written, have the capacity to allow for a resignification of the encountering subject’s relationship to time. I explore how queer aesthetics are formed and used by Fleischmann and their friend, Benjy, to foster this new temporal space. The incorporation of process as an aesthetic form is relevant here: I discuss how the act of making the sculptures and photographs becomes the focus of the queer affect rather than the final products. Some of these sculptures and photographs are only described as *possible* projects. The reader does

not receive confirmation of their completion. This ambiguity becomes pertinent for the affective experience of the reader. I argue in this section that the components of certain queer artworks concoct a space for queer subjects to make time for the inane, the silly, the frivolous, and indeed for much laughter: as my introduction suggests, a chrononormative world does not have 'time' for queers to experience these affects. Furthermore, these moments of queer time, as they stick to the page and aesthetic forms, are conducive to connection and belonging.

This section begins by outlining a photograph created by Fleischmann and Benjy entitled *Post-Scarcity*. This piece comes to fruition and is included as a photograph in the text. Primarily, however, I analyze how the process of creating this piece, told through Fleischmann's narration, itself becomes a significant aesthetic form. Furthermore, Fleischmann and Benjy create alternative uses for the materials of the piece, diverting these items from their straightforward normative paths. The process of creating is significant for Fleischmann. The final product, I argue, is reflective of the worlds created during this process. Following this, I outline their imagined creations: *Squirt!* and *Cranberry Squirt!*. While musing about creating these pieces, Fleischmann divulges feelings of a "deadly serious joy". I then explore how the lack of a final piece is indicative of the dominant social order and the financial constraints it places on queer bodies. Nonetheless, I argue that *in spite of this* Fleischmann and Benjy create moments of queer joy. I delve into this example to flesh out a definition of queer joy that carries on throughout my dissertation.

2.3.1 *Post-Scarcity*

In the middle of their text, Fleischmann grounds their writing in rural Tennessee, detailing the process of creating photographed sculptures and physical scenes produced with Benjy. The materials used are varied and often reappropriated. Using their own prescribed pills (two kinds of testosterone blockers and synthetic estrogen and Benjy's various medications for treating his HIV), the artists spell out "Post-Scarcity" on a mirror reflecting the blue-sky of a southern summer day (2019, p. 58). The letters appear to be floating in a blue sky, encompassing the magic realism of Benjy's photographic style (Russell, n.d.). Indeed, it appears that, perhaps, a Muñozian queer utopian futurity is illuminated through this photo. An "anticipatory illumination of a queer world," for Muñoz is "a sign of an actually existing queer reality, a kernel of political possibility within a stultifying heterosexual present" (2009, p. 49). Much like Muñoz, I suggest through art and aesthetics that these worlds and moments can and do exist now. The materials used to create this illusion incorporate queer aesthetic forms. First, however, I want to examine how Fleischmann details the moments in which they and Benjy work on this piece.

Fleischmann explicitly denotes that the creation of these photographs is not burdened with intentions of artistic mastery validated by academic notions of art, or even with making something deeply meaningful. Rather they state, "Benjy and I make pictures because it's fun and we want to, so we work at a very slow pace, punctuated by beer and cigarettes" (2019, p. 58). This articulation of artistic creation is simple, playful, and queerly indulgent. Flesichmann's explanation of explicitly valuing fun and desire is rather queer, not only in its slow temporal span, but in its negation of art as having an

intended teleology beyond the enjoyable process of creation. As previously indicated, a capitalist world ensures hyperproductivity that works to maximize how efficiently time is "spent" (Freeman 2010). In this section, I want to suggest that the process of dallying and digression is a queer aesthetic form. Queer theorists have argued for the importance of digressions. In doing so, they have demonstrated this importance through their own works that have deviated into counterculture, spending pages exploring niche and obscure subjects, failures and low art (Muñoz, 2009; Freeman 2010; Halberstam 2005). Refusing a linear trajectory can be done through both spatiality and temporality. Discussions of Ahmed's phenomenology accounts for the ways queer bodies can diverge from a well-trodden path laid before us via the confines of heteronormativity (2006b). As my discussion of aesthetics draws close attention to how our bodies move through time, the act of slowly creating art through digressions and breaks can be interpreted as capturing a queer aesthetic form in itself. Minimizing efficiency is a direct resistance to the capitalist temporal framework, as it refuses to move directly from 'point A' to 'point B.' Fleischmann notes that "these digressions, we decide early on, are the most important part of our process" (2019, p. 56). Minimizing our temporal efficacy values an 'in-betweenness' that can be embodied through trans-ness.

The value of embodying this in-between process is explored by trans theorist Lucas Crawford. Crawford argues that rural spaces for queer and trans individuals offer a sense of being 'in-between,' transgressing normative stories of gender journeys that insist on a clear beginning and endpoint (2013). Crawford suggests that rural queers work to deterritorialize the linear narrative of gender as they sit in an in-between space where often their gender may not be intelligible to the majority of the other folks in the rural

population. I connect this to how Fleischmann and Benjy attempt to temporally construct their workday as one that is purposefully divergent. They value these moments of digression, relishing straying from a straight path. It is also interesting to note that they work on these projects in rural Tennessee, almost as if the setting is conducive to the tarrying. By valuing digressions through the process of creating works of art, it is as though Fleischmann and Benjy concoct a queer timeline of their own.

This non-normative timeline corresponds to the art of creative non-fiction, as I have shown that Fleischmann's dialogue does not follow a neat and straight trajectory. It wiggles into little spaces of tangential yet important moments that might not be considered valuable in a traditional capitalist framework. Fleischmann's narration of their process with Benjy suggests that by creating a space to embody temporality queerly, their bodies are no longer constrained in a way that negates queerness. As Fleischmann conveys that these moments are integral, and indeed "the most important" to their process of creation, this can act as an opening to queer belonging. The nature of artistic creation allows Fleischmann and Benjy to be irreverent of capitalism and normative temporal networks. I am then suggesting that through creation, Fleischmann and Benjy are participating in queer world-making (Berlant & Warner, 1998). Crip theorist Eliza Chandler writes that "disability art is vital to the disabled people's movement for its imaginings and perpetuations of new understandings of disability and new worldly arrangements that can hold, even desire them" (2018, pp. 458-459). As Fleischmann represents valuing digressions, they are representing a queer world that embraces a new timeline. This is not to collapse queerness and disability into one another, but as Allison Kafer shows, queer and crip times can coalesce (2012). Art can be an opportunity, as

Chandler suggests, for marginalized bodies to participate in world-making. Cultivating creative practices are inherently moments in which creators have the capacity to skew time, or value a queer time. The consideration of the process opens up consideration for aesthetic forms beyond those of the final product.

In *Post-Scarcity* Fleischmann and Benjy intentionally misuse traditional artistic analytical theories and techniques, thus creating a queer counter-space. Much in the ways that González-Torres reappropriates the usage of hard candy to represent Laycock, Benjy and Fleischmann reappropriate and misuse a multitude of objects for their art. Through their recapitulation of their time spent creating *Post-Scarcity*, Fleischmann writes: "Today, we read from our list of phrases and technical terms we plan to misuse" (2019, p. 58). They are purposefully re-framing these very academic terms as a means to work at queering the institution. As a further reflection on "use" in relation to the institution, Ahmed writes: "this is why I call an institution a well-worn garment: it has acquired the shape of those who tend to wear it such that it is easier to wear it if you have that shape" (2019, p. 44). The structure of the institution is navigated easily by the bodies for whom the institution has been created. "*The more a path is used, the more a path is used"* Ahmed writes (2019, p. 41, emphasis in original). The bodies using the path affect how the shape of the path is constituted. Divergent bodies do not pass through as easily. This hearkens back to and reflects my discussions of queer bodies needing to contort themselves into the structures of chrononormativity. A system made for a certain body is less easy to navigate when you are not embodied in the same way. Thus, when Benjy and Fleischmann pull out terms that have been imbued with meaning by the same bodies repetitively through the institution of academia, they are dislodging them from a pathway

that does not easily serve, or allow, trans and queer bodies. By extracting a traditional term for one's own purposes, Fleischmann and Benjy create their own meanings for these terms. As they create meaning for themselves, they are perhaps forging a new space that fits the non-neutrality of their embodiment, creating a world that imagines an otherwise (Chandler, 2018; Muñoz, 2009).

Alongside the 'misuse' of academic jargon, Fleischmann and Benjy also 'misuse' their pills to create this photograph. I have discussed the queer value in mis-using objects via my discussion of the hard candy in González-Torres' sculpture. David Getsy, in conversation with Jennifer Doyle, also suggests that mis-using items for art is inextricably queer:

> To prompt us to see a material or an object in a different way—against or to the side of its unintended use—is a queer tactic. That 'disavowal of reproductive labor,' as you said, is a refusal to accept (or to *only accept*) the prescribed functions of objects or materials. Knowingly, willfully using something wrong has been deployed by many as a tactic for allegorizing normativity's disavowal of its own partiality. (2013, p. 64)

The usage of pills to spell a word in an artistic photograph means diverting the pills from their intended use. This is emblematic of a "refusal to accept…the prescribed functions of objects or materials" (Getsy & Doyle, 2013, p. 64). Fleischmann does detail recounting and sorting the pills into their appropriate vessels for future 'appropriate' use. However, in that time and space and throughout their creative process, the pills become something more than traditional chemicals for treatment. Rather, they become and represent a world

outside of our normative time and space. In repurposing their use, the artists have the capacity to diverge from a pre-established linear timeline that takes the pills from creation to their ultimate purpose. In becoming part of this piece, the pills take a detour. The objects are no longer attached to the linear path leading them to their intended uses. In doing so, they are also contributing to minimizing temporal efficiency.

I have suggested that the photograph captures a Muñozian anticipatory illumination; a moment of futurity and queerness not available to us in the present dominant social order, but rather "sites…that can be understood as defiantly public glimpses into an ensemble of social actors performing a queer world" (2009, p. 49). I suggest this is done so that the materials used diverge from their intended purposes. The pills' lack of grounding in the composition of the photograph are indicative of a futurity untethered to the normativity of the present. Fleischmann's narration indicates that they themselves, along with other queer and trans friends, have had difficulty accessing their necessary pills and meds. However, in this moment, the photograph captures a realm in which there are pills to spare, pills in the sky, pills to be used to create text, untied from a contextual grounding. Perhaps this post-scarcity is a fantastical world much different from the world in which both Fleischmann and Benjy exist. However, not only does the piece of art create the imagery of this possibility, but in taking the time to create and dawdle and repurpose the use of such materials, Fleischmann and Benjy are also forging a space that does not adhere to the constraints of a linear, capitalistic timeline on the ground. While a Muñozian future, by the very nature of its definition, is always on the horizon and thus unreachable in the present hegemonic world, working to create art can be a space in which we might create a queer world: in which creators have the power to

reconfigure the temporal framework in which they exist. Taking these moments to dwell in these possibilities opens the creators to a queer sense of belonging.

2.3.2 *Squirt!* and *Cranberry Squirt*

> Benjy and I spend a lot of time laughing about *Squirt!* "See," we say, "it's called *Squirt!*," and we usually crack each other up while our friend sits there and maybe politely laughs. We sometimes say it at the start, "So it's called *Squirt!*," and sometimes one of us waits until the very end and says, "and its called *Squirt!*" landing like a punchline we'd never heard before…When Benjy and I really get going we talk about a companion sculpture. It will be a fish tank filled with bright pink liquid, and inside it we're going to hang a neon sign that says, *Do you have to let it linger*? in curly cursive, and we're calling that one *Cranberry Squirt*. Usually by the time we get to revealing the name we're laughing so hard that we're tearing up but that doesn't mean we're not deadly serious. We take our joy very seriously, our deadly serious joy. (pp. 117 – 118)

For another example, I turn to the explicit joy Fleischmann and Benjy experience when they detail and return to plans for two other art pieces which will be part of a photoshoot. Fleischmann describes their intention to create and photograph sculptures with Benjy: *Squirt!* And *Cranberry Squirt*. *Squirt!* is to be a photograph of a sculpture where cans of "Squirt," the lemon-lime soda, will spell out "Squirt!" in giant block letters. They will take separate photos of neon-green liquid "squirting" to prop behind the giant block letters. It will appear as though there is green liquid squirting everywhere. However, the supplies required for this project exceed the budget of the creators. Fleischmann details putting ads on Craigslist "offering to let people see my tits or touch my feet for Squirt cans. I get streams of emails, but all either thinking I mean "penis" when I say, 'Squirt can' or offering me, ridiculously, other kinds of soda" (2019, p. 117). Fleischmann and Benjy's follow-up project idea: *Cranberry Squirt* is to be fish tank with bright pink liquid and a neon sign that says, "do you have to let it linger?" Within the parameters of the

book by Fleischmann, neither piece is created fully nor photographed. However, Fleischmann, provides details indicating that regardless of this lack of completion, the idea of the art pieces gives them great joy: “We take our joy very seriously” they say, “our deadly serious joy” (p. 118).

I suggest that the aesthetics of these pieces also have the capacity to create a new temporal framework that can be conducive to a queer sense of belonging. This subsection will provide a brief analysis of some of these aesthetic forms to show its deviation away from a chrononormative temporality. On top of this, it is also conducive to an affect that I will name queer joy. Like a queer sense of belonging, this affect can be transmitted to a queer reader. I consider the elements of the imagined projects through a phenomenological and affective lens in which I pay attention to how non-neutral bodies *might* encounter this artwork, or more specifically I consider how the reader encounters the art that Fleischmann presents us with, since it is an imaginary structure that lives in Fleischmann’s writing. Previously, in this chapter, I have noted how Fleischmann’s retelling of their encounter with the work by Félix González-Torres transmits an affective feeling of queer belonging from their writing to the reader. I contend that a similar affective chain occurs despite no “real” artistic structure being created, in that the words and Fleischmann’s retelling of their time with Benjy become the piece of art. An affective and phenomenological reading of these excerpts from the book will account for a reader’s subjectivity as well as acknowledge that the lines are blurred between queer forms as they are manifested through words in a book. My analysis will be bolstered by a queer “reading into” of Fleischmann’s aesthetic forms via Doyle and Getsy, as I consider

the name of the soda and sculptures as having a sexual connotation, their erotohistoriographic potential, the possibility of abjection and the excessive neon colours.

These aesthetic elements reinforce the ways in which art can contribute to carving space for queer belonging and accounts for making time for queer joy. These works are not created with an intent to manifest existential significance or for the attempt to espouse and explore and validate queer struggle or trauma. Rather, it feels undeniably *silly* and *inane.* Unlike *Post-Scarcity*, for example, Fleischmann's narration seems to indicate that there is no deeper meaning to the attempted creation of "*Squirt*!" This, then, becomes an unexpected yet poignant example of the need to make time for queer joy. How do these absurd projects, that in Fleischmann's writing, do not physically manifest, insist upon such joy and hilarity? How do their very ideas and kernels of potential exploration instill a feeling of deadly serious joy within the reader? These passages do not merely demonstrate how Fleischmann and Benjy connect to one another. The reader can also feel a connection to both artists. The work offers the reader a queer sense of belonging *and* a queer joy. In spite of a lack of resources, we can imagine creating silly, yet valuable, pieces of art that let us bask in pointlessness for a moment. Queers, alongside the embodied discordance felt through attempted adherence to chrononormativity, are often faced with the responsibility of making *this* world a better place for *queers.* How, then, are queers finding time to work on projects that do not carry this incredible burden? How are we making time to be absolutely silly? We do this, I argue, through art. I do show, however, that this joy hinges upon the recognition that there is work to be done in this world. I do not wish to be read as suggesting silliness is the only thing necessary; but in a

world where queers are not given the time to be silly or absurd, they still forge time and space to do exactly that, lingering in the ridiculous.

2.3.3 "Reading into" *Squirt!*

I interpret Fleischmann's work as having a queer sexual connotation with an erotohistoriographic significance. Not only does Fleischmann's text detail their many sexual encounters, but I also take seriously, via Doyle and Getsy's practice of "reading into" queer art, the possibility of sexuality as being meaningful to queer art. As Fleischmann details the great joy that *Squirt!* brings them and Benjy, I see a connection to bodily fluids, that could be sexual, orgasmic, or full of queer joy. They write:

> There's value just in being happy, I know, in laughing so hard we're crying when we say "Squirt!" for the tenth time that day, liquid just running down our faces and liquid thrown up at the sky like an exaltation, liquid gushing everywhere like you wouldn't believe. Squirting. (2019, pp. 117-118)

The phrasing "like an exaltation" alongside "gushing everywhere like you wouldn't believe," could easily be interpreted as orgasmic, a moment of intense release. I take this idea of "reading into" as having a possible erotohistoriographic meaning, as they find such humour and pleasure in the name of a branded soda: Fleischmann and Benjy are reading into this a celebration of sexuality, associating the soda with bodily fluids, sexual or joyful, or perhaps both. The sexual connotation is highlighted earlier in the text when Fleischmann discusses how they were unable to obtain the necessary materials for the project and thus they go to Craigslist to trade for Squirt cans because the number of cans required exceeds the makers' budget (2019, p. 117). During the descriptions of these

pieces, the very materials becomes associated with genitalia, sexuality, bodily release, and bodily liquids. The name "Squirt" suggests a sexual double-entendre that points to sexuality and the abject in a way that demarcates queerness to the queer subject. Benjy and Fleischmann latch onto this and imbue it with a humour of their own by exaggerating its importance making it the subject of an entire art project. This attention to embodied pleasure through these various fluids is pertinent to Freeman's erotohistoriography. The idea of the piece offers ruptures in a chrononormative temporality through this exaltation of fluid as the creators laugh and leak tears through their mere descriptions, thereby exceeding the temporality of *Squirt!* itself. *Squirt!* cannot be contained and touches its creators with moments of pleasure. It is also significant to consider this rupture extending to the reader of this text, through their possible laughter and even tears of joy alongside the artists as Fleischmann's prose details their moments with Benjy with humour and, as I will later argue, affective queer joy.

The liquid might be interpreted as a fluid being expelled from the human body; yet I suggest that it is not gendered or sexed through a cisnormative framework. In an echo of Fleischmann's trans body, always in process and outside of the dominant social order, the moments of *Squirt!* deny normative gender through their likening of the soda can to a "penis" that is a part of a trans body, to the colloquialism that 'female ejaculation' is referred to as "squirting" (Salama et al., 2015), the neon-green liquid becomes a bodily fluid exceeding the boundaries of an *ambiguously gendered* body. Fleischmann's focus upon bodily fluids, be they tears of laughter or artificial ejaculations from Squirt cans highlights the queer and trans possibility of the abject. Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror* writes: "abjection [is] what disturbs identity, system, order. What does

not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite." The "squirt" as expelled from the body complicates our notions of subjectivity in a moment that is celebrated and pleasurable through imagined orgasm or the laughter Benjy and Fleischmann experience. In *Bodies that Matter,* Judith Butler argues that trans and queer bodies are seen as abject and thus become dehumanized through their exclusion from the "domain of the subject" (1993, p. 3). As Fleischmann and Benjy are purposefully creating these moments of abjection, they work toward centering a world with queer and trans pleasure and laughter, rather than relegating it to the margins. Additionally, in exploring familiar contemporary artworks and their possible manifestations of theoretical concepts, Julian Gutiérrez-Albilla writes that he:

> Reappropriates the notion of abjection in order to explore how the ethical and political dimension of the abject can be associated with a feminist and queer theoretical project whose main function is…to produce a rupture, a crisis in the social and symbolic order. (2008, p. 66)

Thus, the abject holds the possibility of fracture. By taking the time to brainstorm these projects, Fleischmann and Benjy embrace the abject as a moment of disruption. Gutiérrez-Albilla writes, "the abject is less a substance or an object than a process that threatens the boundaries between the subject and its objects, thereby disrupting classificatory structures. The abject, moreover, shatters the wall of repression and its judgements" (2008, p. 74). I suggest that Fleischmann and Benjy are resisting classificatory structures by working on a queer art project that has undeniable bodily

connotations that refuse a gendered category; the pair are creating a world outside of normative classifications with the possibility of temporal cracks.

Let us consider an element of the proposed art works that are denoted quite specifically: the colours. *Squirt*! is going to be bursting with neon-green fluids, *Cranberry Squirt* will have bright pink liquid and a neon sign. These colours, I argue, also denote an excess. This excess is a significant key to the queer joy that is felt by Fleischmann and Benjy. Not only do the fluids seep beyond normative temporal mappings, but so does the choice of colours. In his book *Chromophobia,* artist David Batchelor coins the metonymic term "chromophobia" as the fear of colour. According to this account, straight, capitalist society has worked to maximize efficiency by eschewing the ornamental and the excessive. For Batchelor:

> Chromophobia manifests itself in the many and varied attempts to purge colour from culture, to devalue colour, to diminish its significance, to deny its complexity….colour is made out to be the property of some 'foreign' body – usually the feminine, the oriental, the primitive, the infantile, the vulgar, the queer or the pathological…colour is relegated to the realm of the superficial, the supplementary, the inessential or the cosmetic…either way, colour is routinely excluded from the higher concerns of the Mind. It is other to the higher values of Western culture. Or perhaps culture is other to the higher values of colour. Or colour is the corruption of culture. (2000, p. 22)

Given this framework, not only does colour represent the queer, but the valuation of colour is to value a form of aesthetics deemed as “less serious” and “excessive”. Thus, not only will the magnitude of liquids be excessive in its “squirting” but the use of colour, especially as something denoted as “extra-terrestrial” through Flesichmann’s writing, also serves to embrace an aesthetic form that is reduced to the realm of low interest. This, I suggest, emphasizes the playfulness of *Squirt!* By spending time thinking about, attempting to make, and planning for the project, Fleischmann and Benjy are diverging away from a straightforward trajectory by valuing something deemed “excessive”. I argue that this has temporal implications as is suggested through Muñoz’s discussion of Ernst Bloch and “the ornamental”:

> For Bloch the function of the ornamental surpassed the merely aesthetic. Functional form is aligned with a normalized spatial and temporal mapping of the world, whereas the expressive exuberance of the ornament promises something else—another time and place that is not hamstrung by the present. (2009, p. 150)

I propose that Fleischmann offers their reader a queerly orgasmic exaltation that makes space for the excessive, and indeed, for ridiculousness, outside a world that promotes a relentless march forward. A purely “functional form” would not prioritize the necessity of the “neon-green” of the liquid, as the artists do. The colour suggested is playful beyond the constraints of a temporally efficient capitalism, allowing for the formation of a temporal otherwise.

Alongside elements of abjection and the excess of neon colour, the artists’ incorporation of a brand-name soda into their art project is pertinent. When considered

alongside Muñoz's discussion of the Coke bottle as it emerges through the works of Andy Warhol and poet Frank O'Hara, the Squirt can might also represent the democratization of a reproducible object and an aesthetic otherwise (2009). Muñoz suggests that by bringing forth the Coke bottle, a commercial and everyday product, Warhol and O'Hara attend to its aesthetic capacity in different frameworks, through the silk screen/sketch and poem, respectively. Both artists highlight possibility through the aesthetic of a quotidian object not limited by class, as Muñoz demonstrates some of Warhol's musings wherein he comments on the universal appeal of Coke regardless of status (2009, p. 7). Muñoz writes of a temporal opening via the Coke bottle through which we can read the possibility of queerness in the quotidian: "I see the past and the potentiality imbued within an object, the ways it might represent a mode of being and feeling that was then not quite here but nonetheless an opening" (2009, p. 9). For Muñoz, it represents the ruptures that can be found in the everyday moment that offer the potentiality of something beyond the present. Queer possibility is found through O'Hara's narrator in his poem *Having a Coke with You*, by simply sharing a coke with their lover (Muñoz, 2009,p. 6). Attending the context of this work, Muñoz suggests this signifies a moment outside of heteronormative structures that shape their present moment. The aesthetic of the everyday object can be a conduit to an otherwise.

By utilizing the Squirt can in an alternative framework, Fleischmann and Benjy also demonstrate the aesthetic possibility of this similar, reproducible, everyday object. For Muñoz, this is representative of a futurity, the queerness on the horizon that is nonetheless found through the quotidian. I also consider this to be a temporal opening. Through the aesthetic foregrounding of this object, Fleischmann and Benjy interpret and

create humour in and through the everyday. Like the hard candy in the González-Torres's candy spill, they detach the object from its typical production and consumption trajectory. By reading into the name of the Squirt can, emphasizing an abject double entendre and the excess through the colour, the artists take a moment to forge a temporal space for absurdity via the quotidian. Using what they have (limited) access to, they find and create moments of laughter, a time for queer joy.

Finally, and quite briefly, I consider the nod to the Irish band the Cranberries in including the lyrics "*Do you have to let it linger?*" intended, as Fleischmann notes, to be presented through neon lights and in curly cursive. This intertextual reference cites a band whose height of popularity was during the 1990s, offering us a moment of looking backward, into another time, bringing forth the nostalgic pleasure of days gone by. The use of these lyrics remind the viewer/reader that they are "lingering." The materials and the aesthetic forms that are imagined in these absurd and excessive items develop a pleasurable timeline beyond a hyperproductive chrononormativity. It is in this space that Fleischmann and Benjy imagine, and in some way, materialize through their co-creation, a "deadly serious joy." This deadly serious joy, I argue, is demonstrative of the joy queers find while making temporal worlds of their own.

2.4 "Deadly Serious Joy"

> While Benjy and I are working, we use reflective sheets to take some portraits of ourselves, too, ….When we're done we give the sheets to our friend to use on the house zie is building down the road, which means the silver will be all about preventing radiant heat transfer, as intended. It does feel off to use a lot of resources to make a piece of art, as we drain the earth so fully that our vegetables barely contain nutrients and our water runs dead plastic. Like I go to the museum and

> half the time I think *fuck you*. So it's some comfort that the insulation will go to a home, and that our friends keep drinking Squirt, can after can after can. (2019, p. 118)

This text excerpt directly precedes Fleischmann's declaration that "there's value just in being happy" (2019, p. 118). I consider this framing of Fleischmann and Benjy's exaltation of laughter as laden with meaning. In repurposing these materials for artistic use, they are indeed queering them, creating a divergent trajectory. These art pieces, whether they come to fruition or not, provide a moment of deviation from a normative timeline. Yet, when the materials are pulled apart, they become repurposed again, finding their way back to their original purpose. The reflective insulation sheets go to a friend's home; the soda is consumed by their friends so as not to be wasted. Fleischmann is being intentional with the materials and resources used in their art project. While we might dream of a world with an excess of material to make endless art projects, Fleischmann acknowledges that we are still tethered to a bleak reality.[3] Therefore, I suggest that this temporal world created by the initial repurposing of the materials hinges upon the awareness that the world of our dominant social order has too frequently acted as though resources are endless. More broadly than this, a queer joy is not simply "happiness". It depends upon the contention that the here and now is not made for queers (Muñoz, 2009). Queer joy is complex: it is not without recognition that change must be made in this world, which includes how we must minimize our environmental impact.

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[3] This theme of material excess and repurposing will be present throughout the dissertation via queercore art projects

Additionally, I suggest that a queer sense of belonging makes space for this queer joy: finding this sense of belonging means we are carving out space for moments of humour and silliness. I also suggest in this section that the humour and silliness are not necessarily a political statement. They are not burdened with the task of advocating queer acceptance in our hegemonic world or systemic deconstruction. There are ways that queers are finding time to unburden themselves from chrononormativity *and* expectations of political resistance that often get placed upon marginalized groups. While we carry *knowledge* of our unjust reality, we take a moment to unwind from all responsibilities within which this implicates us. Maybe for a moment, in our queer joy, we waste time in a conventional sense. It is this time-wasting silliness that I argue Benjy and Fleischmann are demonstrating through their *Squirt!* projects. In order to show this, I return to Sara Ahmed.

My preliminary definition of queer joy positions it as an affect fostered through feelings of ease and laughter, which can, in turn, create a sense of belonging. Queer joy is distinct from Ahmed's analysis of "happiness," where happiness can work in ways to hide and shame queerness (2010, p. 112). However, Ahmed's work is a useful launching point upon which to develop this concept. By appealing to this normatively constructed happiness, and showing how this does not fit queer life, I will work to delineate how joy can be created and felt within queer spaces of belonging. Ahmed's critique of "happiness" is a socially enforced trajectory that claims to be the only pathway to fulfillment (2010, p. 11). Often, items and events socially and culturally touted to be the objects of "happiness" align with the values already in place, which then become a way to socially measure "progress" (2010, p. 2). This pathway is marked by choices and

objects that garner social and cultural capital. It is connected to the format of what might be considered the normative life. People strive for marriage and wealth with the expectation it will bring along a feeling of "happiness". Ahmed writes: "the science of happiness could be described as performative: by finding happiness in certain places, it generates those places as being good, as being what should be promoted as goods" (2010, p. 6). The goal of happiness, therefore, as a cultural device, can in turn promote the normative life that is already upheld by a heteronormative, capitalist, racist patriarchy. Hence, we see that marriage, wealth, and property, are all seen as benchmarks of the "happy" life. Nonetheless, we can deconstruct these events and "goods" to show their insidiousness: marriage is a heteronormative construct that privileges specific relationships culturally seen as most valuable, wealth is often accumulated through the exploitation of marginalized workers; property is attached to a neoliberal and individualistic worldview promoting capitalism. Through a queer phenomenological theoretical background and the temporal framing of queerness, I have already argued that a queer life deviates from a heteronormative and linear timeline. Queer joy, then, cannot align with this kind of happiness.

In the chapter "Unhappy Queers," Ahmed writes: "*We must stay unhappy with this world*" (2010, p. 105, emphasis in original). Happiness, in the terms laid out through the social paradigms identified above, serves to perpetuate a system that marginalizes others. Ahmed interrogates the expectation that queer activism ought to produce "happy queers". She argues that a queer cannot be happy in the way that is determined by social structures of happiness, which requires adherence to potentially harmful norms. Ahmed writes that this world is "unhappy with queer love" (2010, p. 117). Happiness is a

straightening device for Ahmed, one that reinforces a *status quo* while seeking to further conceal that many people are unhappy (2010, p. 117). Therefore, Ahmed writes:

> the queer who is happily queer still encounters the world that is unhappy with queer love, but refuses to be made unhappy by that encounter… to be happily queer can be to recognize the unhappiness that is concealed by the promotion of happy normativity. (2010, p. 117)

To be happily queer differs from the happy queer. The happy queer may (perhaps inadvertently) uphold the objects and paths touted as the happy life. However, being happily queer acknowledges that these social and cultural values that determine happiness cause enormous unhappiness. Being happily queer is to be happy with a life that challenges what is socially and culturally considered to be "good" and "happy".

Queer joy then is not tied to a normative form of happiness. I have explored this feeling through Fleischmann's *Time is the Thing,* as I argue it has the capacity to invoke in the reader a feeling of "joy" that is complex, messy, and embodied. Fleischmann claims that they and their friend experience moments of laughter brought on by brainstorming and creating art. Rather than minimizing these moments, Fleischmann takes them seriously, calling this an example of "deadly serious joy". It is my hypothesis that this deadly serious joy, for queers, is an affect we cannot gloss over as unimportant, even as it contains silliness, pointlessness, and absurdity. In fact, I argue that this pointlessness is deeply important. It is serious because we are in a world where the "happy life", according to Ahmed, is unavailable to queers. I argue that queers feeling as though they can laugh so hard they leak tears of joy is then a very serious matter. Not

only is queer joy serious, but it is complex. I do not intend to argue that a queer joy can be found without challenging the world as it is. I hypothesize that queer joy can be made through the construction of other worlds, or other imaginings (Berlant & Warner, 1998), with the acknowledgment that this world is already an unhappy one. Scholarly work through queer worlds formed through art and performance has spoken of belonging and connecting by validating trauma (Pryor, 2017; Blackman, 2011). As I work through these worlds, I contend that these also create opportunities to facilitate queer joy.

I consider the use of the term "joy" to be complicated as Ahmed has written extensively about being the "feminist killjoy." In her work *Living a Feminist Life*, Ahmed explores the conceptualization of the feminist killjoy as the wilful and obstinate young girl, refusing to laugh at racist jokes, being told they do not have a sense of humour (2017). Later, Ahmed writes of the necessity of humour as being within the feminist killjoy survival kit. Humour becomes necessary for survival in the context of racism, capitalism, colonialism, and cis-hetero-patriarchy:

> Of course, we refuse to laugh at sexist jokes. We refuse to laugh when jokes are not funny…But we do laugh; and feminist laughter can lighten our loads. In fact we laugh often in recognition of the shared absurdity of this world; or just in recognition of this world. Sometimes we make jokes out of the points left severed, the bleeding arteries of our institutional knowledge. Sometimes we laugh with each other because we recognize that we recognize the same power relations. (2017, p. 245).

For Ahmed, Feminist Killjoys refuse to laugh at jokes that uphold the *status quo*. This is often where the phrase 'feminist killjoy' comes from to begin with. Humour, in Ahmed's toolkit, is never at the expense of the already marginalized groups. Ahmed notes that sometimes our laughter is a result of an acknowledgement of "the shared absurdity of this world." This speaks to the contingent affect of a queer joy. A queer joy, however related to the humour in our feminist killjoy survival kit, might be felt on another plane, in another world. Feminist survival humour is to survive in this world, as we must do. However, queer joy is built and held in other worlds that we create, as we work to untether ourselves from a chrononormative timeline: a chrononormative timeline that upholds the racist-capitalist-colonialist-cis-hetero-patriarchy. Sometimes, we find humour necessary for existing in this world, sometimes we find joy in another world of our own. Through art and aesthetics, I am suggesting, queers find ways to create other worlds to revel in this joy. We build these worlds with the knowledge of the realities of this one.

2.4.1 *Queer Joy* and *Queer Belonging*: Interrelated Affects

The purpose of this final section is to explore the dialogical relationship between a queer sense of belonging and a queer joy. Using the examples that I have analyzed and provided from Fleischmann, I intend to illuminate how the two affects are interrelated, which then functions to offer a unique space/time for queer people. Perhaps this begins to offer a partial explanation of the draw of queer folks to spaces, places, and moments that incorporate aesthetic elements. Of course, this explanation is not all-encompassing, and it is likely impossible to determine whether it includes a minority or majority of queer folks. Nonetheless, it is an attempt to provide a descriptive explanation through the lenses of queer temporality, phenomenology, and affect theory, of why art and aesthetics are

appealing modes of exploration and connection for queer folks. In this section, I consider the work of Ahmed alongside that of Claire Colebrook. The work of these theorists on joy dialogue with each other in a way that is somewhat antithetical. Yet I suggest that they can exist in a harmonious relationship. Furthermore, I consider the usage of art as a space to heal and look backward to past traumas, particularly via theorist Jack Pryor, and as creating hope for a queer future, via Muñoz. I want to hold these ideas simultaneously. However, what I am suggesting is a queer joy that exists presently, in the now, *despite* the dominant social order. What does this joy look like outside of Fleischmann's examples and how is belonging conducive to joy? Conversely, how does joy contribute to the affective feeling of belonging?

Throughout this chapter, I have worked to show aesthetics have the potential to shift temporality, and I have suggested that this resignification of time can offer the affectivity of queer belonging. As non-normative bodies feel the twists and binds of discordance in a world whose temporal valence is inherently exclusionary, creating a new temporal framework means a space where we can unravel. I want to continue with this metaphor of being bound into a temporal framework. Let us imagine that I am in a body where I have twisted my arm, rolled into a ball, and I am sitting on crossed ankles with pressure upon me from different angles. Perhaps I am trying to fit into a tight space. I can imagine the relief I would feel were I to unfurl from this position if I were offered, or created, a new space within which to unbind. I can imagine an embodied feeling wash over me like the pleasure of a soft bed after a long day of work. I am reminded that even during these times of release and relief, I can recall how the imprints of the stresses and strains of being contorted remain on the surfaces of my skin and deep within my muscles.

There is pain, but there is notable relief. This relief is an acknowledgement that we were once contorted and uncomfortable, stuffing ourselves into a tiny space. Phenomenology and affect theory remind us of how the body remembers the ways in which we are oriented (Ahmed, 2006b; Fillipello, 2018; Sampson, 2020). Our body is affected by the other bodies that we come up against. Thus, this embodied and affective knowledge of this discomfort of another, normative time, remains in my flesh.

I suggest that this is an analog for the knowledge that the dominant world does not allow us to exist within it with ease. While I am feeling relief, I still know pain and we still feel some discomfort. This discomfort may contribute to the feeling of our relief – perhaps it is a reminder to feel grateful for this undoing and unfolding. This feeling that I am describing, is an affect that I want to call queer joy. It is complex as it contains affects that within a normative binary logic would seem to negate one another. Furthermore, it is deeply tied to our relationship to the possibility of feeling a sense of queer belonging. People whose experiences with time are similar can connect through a resignification of temporal frameworks in a way that makes sense to the subjects involved, rather than attempting to fit into a framework that does not allow for ease of movement for divergent bodies: what I have described in the introduction to this dissertation as queer embodied discordance.

Previously, the quotation I explored involving Ahmed's humour states: "Sometimes we laugh with each other because we recognize that we recognize the same power relations" (2017, p. 245). There is an implicit connection between two subjects: despite recognizing something atrocious, one might laugh because they see that someone else holds the same recognition. Queer joy then can perhaps foster a similar connection

with another subject, thus contributing to a queer sense of belonging. If we concede, through both phenomenology and affect theory, that our disposition is a result of imprinted affective memory, orientating us to certain objects, then the moments of joy that affect one person are likely to affect someone who shares a similar embodiment. This laughter, this joy, brings forth the possibility of connection in sharing these moments in a queer world of belonging. There might be connection in shared joy.

I return again to Fleischmann's encounter with the González-Torres piece, *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.).* I theorized that they felt a sense of belonging through their descriptions of this encounter and through the aesthetic elements of this encounter, as well as through their reflection of how they felt in and through and after this encounter. As I discussed, during this encounter they indicated that they felt a reprieve, and perhaps a momentary belonging. This is not simply to locate an affirmative turn in a world not designed for queer and trans people, but that in these moments and spaces there is room for feelings indicative of a space of belonging as Pryor, Blackman, Love, and Muñoz suggest. This allows for the validation of a traumatic past, and for room to imagine a utopic future.

In *The Promise of Happiness,* Ahmed extends her critique of happiness to a critique of the 'affirmative turn' in ethics (2010, pp. 213-214). This means ethics fixates on positive feelings. Ahmed suggests, as I have noted, that words can be sticky and happiness is laden with moral and political valences. For Ahmed, joy is not as weighty as happiness, but she cautions us against using it as a stand-in for happiness. For Ahmed, the affirmative turn seems to position bad feelings as backward, whereas she wishes to acknowledge these bad feelings and learn from them, as they are indicative of the ills of

society. Indulging in queer joy might mean intertwining these bad feelings with good feelings. I wish to complicate this interpretation of an affirmative turn, as I want to hold the importance of making room for queer joy alongside room for a hopeful future, and room for an acknowledgment of bad feelings. I want queer joy to be held beside a multitude of important queer affects, much like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's work that challenges binary thinking in *Touching Feeling*:

> *Beside* is an interesting proposition because there is nothing very dualistic about it; a number of elements may lie alongside one another, though not an infinity of them. *Beside* permits a spacious agnosticism about several of the linear logics that enforce dualistic thinking: noncontradiction or the law of the excluded middle, cause versus effect, subject versus object. (2002, p. 8)

The affect itself holds typically dualistic feelings within it, while existing in relation to other positive and negative affects. Indeed, their relationship to one another means that these affects might be difficult to parse out. But the focus on *queer* joy differs from normative happiness and being, what Ahmed calls, the happy queer.

I have many reasons for exploring this as a potential affect created in and through art, but primarily, I argue that we must create space where the burdens of queerness in a normative world are no longer burdens. For a moment, perhaps, we can create worlds outside of this. As such, I analyze Claire Colebrook's interpretation of joy in literature as a category that seems to eschew traditional narrative models that are expected and imposed upon us. Colebrook argues that narratives of happiness depend upon a telos that is political and normative (2007). She recognizes a dialectical relationship between happiness and joy: happiness depends upon a "life as a well-formed and bounded whole"

and joy as a "broader life that exceeds and transcends any single organism" (2007 p. 86). A single organism, for Colebrook, can also imply the broader meaning of the world that is conceived of as being bound up in a whole, such that a harmonious justice will accrue, and things will be wrapped up neatly.

As Colebrook argues: "the idea of human life as a self-narrating and self-temporalizing whole relies on an image of life as a soul-directed activity, in which immanent ends govern acts" (2007, p. 89). If this is the case, if we think of queer aesthetic form as process rather than as final product, it is already evident how queer aesthetics can challenge the normative nature of wholeness and resolution. This is apparent when we see how Fleischmann and Benjy continue to laugh about, discuss, and create new ideas for art projects that never come to fruition. Because, for instance, of a lack of resources that are directly embedded within the constraints of an inequitable world, the project remains unfinished. And yet, we still find significant hilarity and joy within this.

A queer joy is beheld through the embodied knowledge of queer constraint in a normative world, giving us a momentary reprieve in a time with a queer sense of belonging. It means holding a positive affect in a new world outside of this world that does not wish to harbor this affect within these divergent bodies, and then returning to the constraints of this world. Simultaneously, it means acknowledging that we ought to make room for healing, for trauma, for looking toward and anticipating a queer utopian futurity. It means acknowledging that perhaps things will never be finished, neither within the purview of our physical lifetime, nor within a whole and immanent world, but that we can still feel pleasure despite and because of all this. I consider, for example, the laughter

I feel as I read Fleischmann's re-telling of *Squirt!* aloud to my friend. We laugh through our connectedness and acknowledgment that many of our creative projects lack funds (be it monetary or temporal) and thus will never come to be. But we connect to Fleischmann and Benjy and we feel, for a moment, a part of their queer world in its absurdity, beginning to come untethered from a dominant social order.

2.5 Conclusion: Queer Art and Sticky Connections

I have suggested that much like a queer sense of belonging, Fleischmann transfers a queer joy onto the page. This affect can impress itself upon the reader dependent upon their situated circumstances. Queer art, then, has the capacity to transmit sticky affects and can foster belonging and connection. Aesthetics become conduits to experiencing a new, queer temporality where subjects can unbind. In this time, queers can connect to other participating subjects as they converge in a new temporal space away from, but aware of, normativity. Often, this is conducive to dawdling in moments of silliness. Yet, this does not take priority over moments of healing or dwelling in queer sadness. I believe these affects are equally important and can exist in tandem.

Queer aesthetics as conducive to these forms of queer connection offer significant possibility. Aesthetics that can be apprehended through media such as literature and photographs, as I have shown here, and have the potential to foster queer connection and joy without the element of in-person participation, perhaps opening possibilities for the accessibility of art. This is not to say that this would be the same experience as someone directly viewing and participating in *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* in person. Yet, Fleischmann's own art transmits some of the affects they experienced when having the

opportunity to encounter González-Torres's art in person. Through this, the reader gets a mediated experience. This added layer offers connection not only to González-Torres, but to Fleischmann as well. Readers can feel a queer sense of belonging and joy alongside Fleischmann, coalescing all subjects in a possible queer time.

Chapter 3

3 "All Art is Quite Useless:" Camp, Queerness, and Belonging/Exclusion at the Metropolitan Museum of Art

In this chapter, I explore The Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (the Met) in New York City. Specifically, I draw from a personal experience of attending the exhibition "Camp: Notes on Fashion" which was held in the museum from May to September in 2019. The previous chapter delved into the nature of a queer sense of belonging and queer joy through a contemporary queer literary text. Here, I investigate how these affects might be experienced through the immersive participation of attending a queer exhibit in a large museum. I begin by detailing the exhibition itself as it was staged during the 50th anniversary of the 1969 Stonewall Riots in New York City and recount the journey into its hot pink extravagantly adorned hallways. By focusing on one segment of the large exhibit, I argue that one of the effects of the curation was to create to a queer sense of belonging via the nature and aesthetics of a camp sensibility, and a focus on queer figures out of step with chrononormativity. Following this, I address the complicated nature and fraught history of the museum, through a queer phenomenological lens: those with institutional power have decided which objects are worth exhibiting and preserving. Historically, these objects are representative of the histories and knowledges structural inequalities have prioritized. Celebrating queerness in such a mainstream setting is valuable yet comes with some discomfort. Notably, I analyze the exhibition's marketability and ties to capitalism and chrononormativity as well as its stark exclusion of poor queers and Black queer camp. Consequently, I make space for an archive of *complex* feelings, through which I consider how art can be

temporally transformative and simultaneously, in this case, insufficient for a queer joy, as I have defined it in my earlier in this thesis.

3.1 Camping out at the Met

On the same trip to New York City where I had found my beloved copy of T Fleischmann's *Time is the Thing a Body Moves Through*, my companion and I explored various art museums. During this time, the Met was still housing its exhibit on "Camp: Notes on Fashion" curated by The Costume Institute. While eager to engage with fashion history and invigorated by New York itself, I did not expect to have such a revelatory moment or feel a queer sense of belonging at this highly monetized and popular exhibit. However, The Costume Institute, under the Costume Institute's head curator, Andrew Bolton, pieced together the exhibit in such a way that it evoked within me profound moments of being in queer time and space, an experience similar to my immersion in Fleischmann's text.

Prior to my trip, I had rather cynically scoffed at various celebrities trying to emulate "camp" fashion during the Met Gala in May 2019. My decidedly anti-normative disposition primed me with a skepticism about the mainstream's take on an aesthetic sensibility historically intertwined with queerness. Even so, it remained an opportunity to explore the queer influences of fashion, paying homage to a queer history often eclipsed in traditional settings. The Costume Institute annually curates a fashion exhibition that highlights and uncovers thematic imagery and major (primarily Western) cultural influences, with themes including "Manus x Machina: Fashion and the Age of Technology" from 2016 and "Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination" in

2018 (“The Costume Institute,” n.d.). Each thematic exhibition is launched with an extravagant gala that includes an elite guestlist. Attendees are encouraged to dress to reflect the year’s theme. The Met Gala is highly documented and photographed each year with various entertainment sources providing live updates on celebrity fashion choices. Hosted by Vogue editor-in-Chief, Anna Wintour, the evening is a main attraction for both the entertainment and fashion industries. The theme in 2019, “Camp: Notes on Fashion,” invited attendees to model their own interpretations of “camp,” and featured the camp stylings of celebrities such as Lizzo, Billy Porter, Lady Gaga, and Janelle Monáe.

The exhibit was framed by Susan Sontag’s 1964 paper “Notes on Camp,” in which she works at unraveling the slippery knot of campiness. While camp eludes a clear definition, Sontag settles on its nature as being more of a sensibility than a technique, practice, or set of stable characteristics. The Met website describes the exhibit as follows:

> Through more than 250 objects dating from the seventeenth century to the present, The Costume Institute's spring 2019 exhibition explores the origins of camp's exuberant aesthetic. Susan Sontag's 1964 essay "Notes on 'Camp'" provides the framework for the exhibition, which examines how the elements of irony, humor, parody, pastiche, artifice, theatricality, and exaggeration are expressed in fashion. (“Camp: Notes on Fashion,” 2019)

Much of this “exuberant aesthetic” dovetails with queer and trans histories. Andrew Bolton, in an interview with Vogue, stated that the theme was “so timely with what we are going through culturally and politically that [he] felt it would have a lot of cultural resonance” (Bowes, 2019). While Bolton does not clarify what he means by what we “are

going through culturally and politically," contributors of the Met have written online articles highlighting the exhibit alongside NYC's "World Pride" in June 2019 (Van Godstenhoven, 2019) that refer to the ever-present struggle for LGBTQIA+ rights, specifically as the exhibition was held during the latter half of a tumultuous presidential era in the United States, wherein Donald Trump's political actions posed serious threat to the safety of LGBTQIA2S+ populations (Human Rights Campaign, 2020).

Inside the museum, we followed other groups who appeared to be on the same mission to experience an exhibit made famous by the Met Gala. We entered crowded hallways painted a bright pink to highlight the artifice of camp. According to the Met website, it was one of the most highly attended exhibits in the history of the museum ("The Costume Institute," n.d.). Even as a discrete member of a dense crowd, I felt the queer beauty ooze through the pink hallways, statues, costumes, and portraits, affecting me deeply. Objects and art manifesting the "private code" of camp were on public display and converged into one space. Sontag writes that camp is one of the "hardest things to talk about" (1964, p. 275), which echoes the way that queerness continues to evade our drive to produce definitions. Elements of camp include "decorative art, emphasizing texture, sensuous surface, and style at the expense of content" (Sontag, 1964, p. 278). Throughout the exhibit, these elements were showcased through haute couture garments, portraiture, music, film, illustrations, and writing. The space is structured to take you on a chronological journey of "camp," through statues standing "se camper" (Van Godstenhoven, 2019), to Oscar Wilde, to the photographs and writings of Susan Sontag, to tracing a (limited) history of drag culture, into an open room with pieces of costume and clothing from various fashion designers ("Camp: Notes on Fashion,"

2019). Notable pieces include the white-feathered swan dress infamously worn by Björk, by designer Marjan Pejoski, a waist-belt by Jeremy Scott with a life-sized silhouette cut-out of a voguing figure inspired by iconic voguer Willi Ninja, and an enormous tulle and tufted dress of lavenders and pinks emblazoned with the phrase "Less is More" by Viktor and Rolf[4] ("Camp: Notes on Fashion," 2019).

The textures, colours, and sounds were immersive: overwhelmingly beautiful and at times ugly, serious and cheeky, melancholic and joyous. Although I had not expected to be so affected, I had become a member of the world of camp. My companion and I lost track of time. We ignored the directional flow of the space to return to pieces that moved us. The crowds continued to shuffle through, and I overheard folks trying to pinpoint the type of "camp" emphasized by the displayed objects with comments such as: "Do you think this piece is *high* camp or *low* camp?," referencing Christopher Isherwood's camp classifications. The exhibit haunted me, demanding that I linger among what I was being offered. Perhaps I was prone to some sort of Derridean archive fever, afraid to miss something, afraid I would not have the adequate time to show my favourite pieces their due respect, the time to absorb their affect (Cvetkovich, 2003; Derrida, 1995). A maze of hallways adorned with camp objects opened onto a vast square room with high ceilings; camp's shifting influence in the world of high fashion was made material in the garments

[4] It is important to note that Dutch designers, Viktor and Rolf debuted a fashion line in 2001 wherein during its showcase models were painted fully black (Givhan, 2001). Despite claiming their intention was to emulate silhouettes and shadows, this choice conjured images of blackface and was ignorant to the horrific history tied to the practice. I include this to bring to light the histories of objects that come into view (Ahmed, 2006b) as these white designers were featured in this exhibition without acknowledgement of this harmful past, and furthermore, possibly precluding the inclusion of Black designers and their contribution to camp, a point to which I later return. At my time of attendance, I was not aware of this history. This knowledge unsettles my initial ease of moving through the space.

displayed on mannequins. Voices describing the nature of camp through a range of definitions reverberated over the speakers. Most of the attendees appeared to follow the chronological trajectory, only stopping to take a quick photo. In the giant open space that concluded the exhibit, we took in the final costumes, knowing that beyond the door the "real" world awaited us.

The exhibition's floor plan followed a standard historically linear trajectory, common to Western museum exhibits. Despite this overarching chrononormative framing, I suggest the curation might have been temporally queer in some ways, lending itself to affective meaning with queer participants. The exhibit catalogue adds some of the first accounts of the word "camp" in a Western context. Early Roman sculptures of muscular male bodies, demonstrating camp's "Beau Ideal," were accompanied by clothes, prints, and photos that deliberately mixed historical contexts: an Italian sculpture of a nude male from 1683 CE donned a pair of Vivienne Westwood leggings from 1989 (2019, p. I/64). The campiness of Oscar Wilde was portrayed through portraits and cartoons alongside illustrations of garments from Yves Saint Laurent in 1993-4 depicting a reminiscent camp/dandy style. A Gucci ensemble from the spring/summer 2017 collection, that carried traces of Wildean influence, included a long skirt sewn to the waist of a suit jacket, placed beside the portrait of Wilde by RG Harper Pennington. This strategic proximity and hybrid temporality fostered a visual connection that showcased a similar camp sensibility resurfacing in multiple eras. This curation honours the sartorial aesthetics of Wilde while demonstrating how his queer fashion has been influential for more than a century. I suggest that Bolton's curatorial decisions can connect queers to

one narrative of queer history, or maybe another time and place outside of our chrononormative world.

3.2 Over the Rainbow with Oscar and Judy

I want to focus on one moment that resonated for me personally. This moment stuck with me beyond the doors of the Met and after I left New York City. This phenomenological and affective experience is a singular example of how queer art and aesthetics contribute to a queer belonging, a moment to untwist from the expectations of heteronormativity. Early in the exhibit (if you are following it in the intended chronological order), there was a section dedicated to Wilde, containing the aforementioned artworks. On the pink walls was the following inscription:

> In 1909 the word "camp" first entered the hallowed and sanctioned pages of a dictionary: J. Redding Ware's Passing English of the Victorian Era: A Dictionary of Heterodox English, Slang, and Phrase. The entry read: "Actions and gestures of exaggerated emphasis. Probably from the French. Used chiefly by persons of exceptional want of character." At the time, the "homosexual-as-type" was a new concept in England. Although the Austro- Hungarian writer Karl-Maria Kertbeny coined the term "homosexual" in the late 1860s, it was not until the mid-1890s that the word appeared in English, when John Addington Symonds described it in his book *A Problem in Modern Ethics* (1896).
>
> Inextricably linked to these emerging concepts is the image of the effeminate aristocrat, a stereotype exemplified by the Anglo-Irish poet and

> playwright Oscar Wilde. The author's appearance—in his early years as an aesthete and in later years as a dandy—gave rise to numerous caricatures focusing on vanity, effeminacy, and superficiality. In 1895, following an ill-advised lawsuit against the Marquess of Queensbury, the father of his young lover Lord Alfred Douglas, who had accused him of posing as a "Somdomite [sic]," Wilde was tried for "gross indecency." Found guilty, he was sentenced to two years imprisonment with hard labor. His sensationalized trial and martyrdom provided a context in which "a camp' and "a homosexual" overlapped and intersected in a public personage. ("Exhibition Galleries," 2019)

The highlight of this corner of the exhibit, for myself at least, was the Harper Pennington Portrait of Wilde in which he stands "se camper" with a long coat and a smug expression. He holds an ornamental cane. Peering at this portrait in the pink halls of a fashion exhibit, I had an urge to erupt in a fit of laughter. He looked so self-assured, smirking at me as if he had made an innocent quip at my expense. I also welled up with tears of complex emotion knowing he had died young and been a figure of such controversy after his trials. This made me simultaneously hurt for him. While I was overcome by these feelings, a 1939 recording of Judy Garland singing "Over the Rainbow" played over the speakers. Here was a curated moment that seemed to call to me personally: as if the curators had imagined my queer childhood and my love for the Wizard of Oz[5]. I felt as if we were

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[5] I acknowledge that the 1939 film that captured my imagine is based upon the novels by L. Frank Baum who has a documented history of advocating for a genocide against Indigenous Peoples (Derry, 2014). Like the designers Viktor & Rolf mentioned above, I consider this with unease, but also hold my early memories of the affinity with this film tenderly. Similar discomfort weaves throughout this chapter.

somehow all together. Garland, Wilde, my younger self, my current self, skipping off to Oz; or perhaps in that moment we were already there. This moment may read as saccharine and perhaps overly romanticized, but I suggest that the effect of this curation is to produce an equally unique and universal experience all at once. Claiming a queer connection to Oscar Wilde and Judy Garland is truly akin to claiming a connection to the rainbow flag itself –all have become widely recognized and iconic representations of queerness. I want to investigate further how the curators chose queer objects to invoke particular aesthetic experiences. This combining of the universal and the particular is one of the appeals of public exhibitions and what makes museumgoers return to them time and again.

3.2.1 Queer Figures, Queer Temporalities

In this section, I provide a temporal and affective analysis of this moment, accounting for my own positionality. This brief exploration shows how these specific art spaces contributed to my own queer sense of belonging. However, this merely presents a sliver of the wide range of potential stories. Staring at the looming figure of Oscar Wilde, the perceiving subject relates to his body language in particular ways as he poses "se camper." Karen Van Godtsenhoven, an associate curator of the exhibit, notes in a blog post for the museum that to pose *se camper* is a theme throughout art history, and displayed through many of the pieces in the exhibit:

> The stance is characterized by the careful balance of the shoulders, which are turned away from the hip, and resting of the weight on the back foot, which highlights symmetrical musculature, youthful athleticism, and an even tempered noble character. One arm is bent

> from the hip and the hand is turned back, which signals both power and relaxation. (Van Godtsenhoven, 2019)

Van Godtsenhoven suggests that Oscar Wilde, in Pennington's portrait, embodies a "restrained, dandy-like pose with a walking cane and gloves" (2019). Nonetheless, his weight is on his back foot, his knee is bent, and his hand, holding leather gloves, is also on his hip, imitating a version of *se camper*.

While there might be a fraught history of queerness and its association with exaggerated body language and effeminacy, I look towards José Esteban Muñoz, who reclaims this through a temporal lens. I bring forth Muñoz's description of dancer Fred Herko in *Cruising Utopia* while recalling the discussion of "excess" in my previous chapter. Muñoz writes that Herko's dancing style was atypical of the fluidity associated with professional dance (2009, p. 151). Muñoz suggests that the unique movement exemplifies "utopian traces of other ways of moving within the world" (2009, p. 147), and describes the way in which "excess" is characterized as surplus value in capitalist economics. While this is often translated into abundant profit, Muñoz uses excess in this framework as a "potentially disruptive integer within late capitalism's formulations" (2009, p. 147). Camp, as we have seen, values the exaggerated. If we are considering this against a chrononormative lens which prioritizes a linear and capitalist temporal mapping, then diverging from this linearity and forward movement has the potential to produce a queer temporal moment. Muñoz spends the beginning of this chapter focusing on Herko's death by suicide, which is rumoured to be the result of dancing and leaping out of a window. Through this, he connects Herko's dance style in a way that reflects the work of Ernst Bloch and Bloch's idea of the "ornamental" (2009, p. 147). According to

Muñoz, Herko's dancing was "excessive and campy" (2009, p. 150), and did not align with traditional dance movements, in that there was often a "stuttering off-courseness" in his movements (2009, p. 151). For Muñoz, this ornamental surplus represented a divergence from the capitalist concept of excess:

> The divergence has to do with a politics that may not have the overarching coherency of a movement yet but may nonetheless represent a valuable interruption in the coercive choreography of a here and now that is scored to naturalize and validate dominant cultural logics such as capitalism and heterosexuality. (2009, p. 162)

In other words, Herko embraced an excess that often led him to step out of cultural norms and thus step outside of time. I suggest that this defies the chrononormative ideal where bodies are bound to maximize their efficiency. It is not "efficient" to be campy. Although Wilde's pose might be a bit restrained, the connection to camp as having excessive gesturing and actions is, I argue, evidence of minimizing bodily efficiency and in some way maximizing the useless, the flamboyant and the swishy. As I have already argued, a chrononormative existence maximizes our embodied capacities for peak productivity. To be over-the-top without a capitalist teleology, but perhaps for art's sake alone, is indeed very queer. In my earlier discussion of the excess and garish colours of "Squirt!," I refer to Muñoz's borrowing from Bloch to theorize that the "ornament promises…another time and place that is not hamstrung by the present" (2009, p. 150) This privileging of the ornamental through the body language of Wilde and even his ornamental cane against the backdrop of the bright pink walls offers an alternative way of being that is curated for the queer attendee.

The curators describe Wilde as an aesthete, dandy, and writer, "The author's appearance…gave rise to numerous caricatures for vanity, effeminacy, and superficiality" ("Exhibition Galleries," 2019). Aestheticism, also known as "art for art's sake" or "l'art pour l'art," is the movement that values art outside of the categories of the political or the moral of capital gain to explicitly resist the developments of industrialism. Rather it focuses on beauty in and for itself. Literary and cultural theorist Kelly Comfort writes of aestheticism:

> Because those who adopted aestheticism as a view of life insisted on placing the aesthetic at the forefront of life, art was promoted as a quasi-religion, as an alternative ethic of industrial-capitalist society that undermined the place of art and the artist in the changing marketplace. (2011, p.7)

Valuing aestheticism was a direct response and challenge to a capitalist society that rapidly changed pace via the industrial revolution. Through this view, art is seen as having a purely aesthetic value that cannot be measured by the metrics of capital.

Through her exploration of aestheticism, Comfort seems to conflate the terms "aestheticism" and "dandyism" (2011, p. 7). However, literary theorists Rita Felski and Elisa Glick describe the dandy more specifically, through two threads of the "dandyism" movement. The first references how the dandy takes up a purely superficial identity that prioritizes a deliberately insubstantial aesthetic beauty; secondly, dandyism endorses a repudiation of the rapidly growing industrial-capitalist movement that equates value with usefulness (Felski, 1991; Glick, 2001). As a "dandy," Wilde incarnates the refutation of capitalist-determined value-systems, and in turn, heteronormativity, to the extent that it

upholds capitalist structures. The dandy might therefore be seen as a figure that resists a chrononormative timeline. Bodies are no longer mediated by their efficiency in terms of production, but through their beauty, or perhaps their uselessness. In her analysis of Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Glick writes that the protagonist "implicitly repudiates the mechanical reproduction at the heart of the consumer revolution, privileging the imperfections and detail of hand labour over the uniformity of the machine" (2001, p. 141-142). As a possible interpretation of dandyism, Dorian Gray shows that the hand-labour of an object of "beauty" that is not mass-produced is, essentially, a waste of time in the eyes of the capitalist. This sentiment is reflected through this chapter's title which borrows from Wilde's preface to *Dorian Gray*, which he ends simply with "all art is quite useless" (2010, p. xiv). Glick nevertheless acknowledges that having access to the beauty of objects outside of mass-production is an aristocratic position. Both Wilde and his protagonist occupied such a position, which is perhaps not entirely out of step with the monetization it was intended to challenge (2001).

Finally, regarding the overall presentation of the figure of Wilde in this moment, I argue that in this exhibit Wilde embodies a figure who was out of step with the temporality of his own material historical context. Although there has been an extraordinary amount of work done on Wilde's work and his life, the setting here demands that we attend to this portrait and its curation. That Wilde was charged as a "sodomite" is underscored by the curation and thus mediates the viewer's response to the exhibit, foregrounding Wilde's lived reality as well as his role as an artist. Perhaps, as Bolton suggests, it is "timely" to think of Wilde now, in a more "progressive" context.

Had he lived during the time of the 2019 camp exhibition in North America, he would not be on trial for these same crimes. However, to his contemporaries, he was a deviant. If we recollect Sara Ahmed's discussion of queer phenomenology, to be queer is to deviate from the straight path (2006b). Thus, what I suggest is that this exhibit is highlighting Wilde's misalignment with the temporality of his historical context: his body language, dandyism, and sexual "deviancy" distinctly defied a heteronormative path. Therefore, I think this curation of Oscar Wilde as the aesthete, dandy, and convicted "sodomite," gives the viewer an opportunity to challenge how we think about time. For the non-chrononormative queer who might also feel out of step with their day-to-day world, this might be an opportunity to experience a timeline that resonates with a queer sense of belonging.

I also want to consider the placement of Wilde as a queer figure alongside Garland's 1939 version of "Over the Rainbow." To suggest that all queers would feel the same affinity as me in this space would be an overgeneralization. However, Judy Garland's voice and words allowed me to look backwards to my own past and the mass queer appeal of these figures suggests I may not have been alone in this. References to Garland as embodying "camp" were prevalent throughout the exhibit. However, the choice of Garland singing this song in this space is also indicative of a new valuing of temporality. Of course, she was known for being a respected, albeit difficult to work with, performer, and she connected to and continues to be honoured by many homosexual men (Shipman, 1996). Along with being a celebrated icon, gay men adopted her most famous role in a secret queer code to connect with other gay men by asking if they were "a friend of Dorothy's" (Shipman, 1996, p. 399). Placing Wilde alongside this

historically rich song by this influential figure highlights how both Wilde and Garland have played significant roles in the progress narrative of LGBTQ existence in the North American context. While this is a clear connection, I argue it goes even further.

Unlike Wilde's portrait, there was no description of Garland's song to draw upon in the exhibit. However, while there are numerous and varied accounts of Garland's biography, the dominant one is ultimately one of "queer failure" (Muñoz, 2009, p. 155). Muñoz finds it valuable to "turn to failed visionaries, oddballs, and freaks who remind queers that indeed they always live out of step with straight time" (2009, p. 149). Rather than finding the "exemplary protagonist" as is often done in gay and lesbian studies, Muñoz suggests that turning to these failed queers is valuable for exploring cracks in the normative framework, so we can explore utopian queer futures (2009, p. 149). Similarly, Jack Halberstam also turns to queer failures, as these stories "provide the opportunity to use negative affects to poke holes in the toxic positivity of contemporary life" (2011, p. 3). Therefore, the background of Judy Garland alongside Oscar Wilde opens the queer viewer to the possibility of escaping from the constraining conventions of heteronormative life. In his biography of Judy Garland, David Shipman details the many facets of Garland's young life in showbusiness that led to her addiction and to her eventual death of an overdose at the age of forty-seven. Shipman acknowledges the multiple ways Garland was accused of being too ugly or fat by several significant members of the Hollywood industry. In the world of Hollywood, her body was not the prescribed ideal, and may also have been a little deviant. Because of this, she was given diet pills at a formative age:

> The pills Garland took killed the desire for food but increased her hyperactivity, with the result that she would be wide awake when she should have been going to bed. She would then be given pills to help her sleep; then, when she awoke, too drowsy even to react she arrived in the makeup department at seven, she would be given a dose of something else. She had unwittingly stumbled into a topsy-turvy world, and the results would be devastating. (Shipman, 1996, p. 77)

Through fat-shaming and accusations of inadequacy, the world of showbusiness worked to literally squeeze Garland's body into the pretty and thin girl who sang beautifully. Her body continued to break down as she suffered severe insomnia for much of her life, so that her circadian rhythm, that is the timeline on which she was supposed to be awake and asleep, was disrupted (Shipman, 1996). She can be seen as an example of queer failure because she could not fit into the prescribed timeline or embodiment of the Hollywood ideal, or of the straight path Ahmed describes and the chrononormative temporalities delineated by Elizabeth Freeman. As a result, she suffered death at a young age (perhaps she had been out of sync for too long).

Furthermore, the curators' choice of song speaks emotively of a yearning for an elsewhere: "Someday I'll wish upon a star/ And wake up where the clouds are far behind me/ Where troubles melt like lemon drops/ Away above the chimney tops/That's where you'll find me" (Camp: Notes on Fashion, 2019). The imagery describes somewhere that is not here, because "here" is where troubles lie, and as Garland sings, she yearns for another place. It seems that queers need a different experience of time and thus have

connected to this yearning for an elsewhere. The curation of this song of yearning with its history of the complex and tragic Garland, alongside the equally troubled Wilde, can work to evoke within the queer viewer a desire for another time and place. As this space allows us to value the frivolous, the failed, the tragic, the excessive, the ornamental and the "wasting of time," it might be connecting us to another time altogether.

3.2.2 Sitting in the Corner of a Circular Room[6]: What is Camp?

The act of defining camp has been the subject of much debate in queer and aesthetic theories. Camp's shifting and elusive nature evades any neat categorizations and fuels an ongoing conversation. This same slippery nature can function as an affective aesthetic form that can contribute to the creation of queer worlds beyond our chrononormative framework. In his discussion of the Met Gala on camp, Constantine Chatzipapatheodoridis wrote that "Camp Praxis is precisely that flight from interpretation; its absurdity is a bizarre assault on the rationality behind any intelligible approach" (2019, p. 13). This absurdity makes way for a unique form of knowledge: a sensibility that is beyond our standard frameworks of traditional linear temporal thought. Discussing ephemeral traces of queer knowing, Muñoz writes that "queerness is illegible and therefore lost in relation to the straight minds' mapping of space. Queerness is lost in space or lost in the relation to the space of heteronormativity" (2009, p. 72). This connection between camp and queerness appears in theorists such as Fabio Cleto, whose work in this specialized area has shaped much of the curated exhibit. Much like Sontag's

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[6] This references an article by theorist Andy Medhurst (1991) that is quoted throughout the exhibit, its supplementary catalogue, as well as by Fabio Cleto in his 1999 reader *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject*.

"Notes on Camp," the Met provided *examples* of camp and how it has connected with fashion over time. By allowing multiple perspectives and definitions of camp from various theorists and artists, the Met has avoided a stable set of definitions. Like queerness, camp's indefinability has become more of a *sensibility* than a definable adjective. The following section explores camp's ability to continually elide normativity, its playfulness and defiance of linear temporality and the ways in which it can contribute to a queer sense of belonging.

The shifting elusive nature of camp means that it defies co-optation by normative frameworks. The Met shows us how ways of being in the world that are often marginalized have artistically and aesthetically had a deep mainstream impact. Chatzipapatheodoridis reminds us that this is a *dialogical* relationship, as purveyors of camp have always celebrated mainstream pop icons (2019). Even as camp establishes a dialogue with the mainstream, Cleto attends to the possibility that like queerness, camp's evasiveness makes room for antinormativity:

> Camp and queer, in fact, share in their clandestine, substantial inauthenticity, and in their unstable and elusive status, a common investment in 'hetero-doxía' and 'para-doxía' as puzzling, questioning deviations from (and of) the straightness of orthodoxy, and through that the constitution of an aristocracy of 'queer peers' by way of a counter-initiation devoiding the subject of its fullness, and permanence – in other words, of its transcendent immanence. (1999, p. 16)

Camp is an exclusive sensibility available to those in the know, those who are invested in challenging the normative even as they borrow from it and interact with it. In the

catalogue that accompanied the "Camp: Notes on Fashion" exhibition, Cleto queries the uptake of camp by the dominant culture: "Still, then, may it be the 'weapon of the dispossessed?'" (2019, p. I/55). As with Muñoz's framing of queer knowledge, there is a tension in camp's engagement with mainstream culture; Cleto reminds us that "camp has suffered many deaths, yet none at all" (2019, p. I/57). As marketable movements perceive a potential in the monetizing of camp, camp might slip through capitalism's fingers only to return newly formulated, or wearing an old costume, in another time and place. Despite its intentional challenge to mainstream discourse, camp will continue to engage with and profit from the cultural frameworks produced by capitalism. This tension will continue to inform my analysis of camp.

Camp sensibility has historically valued playfulness and this capacity to be playful and frivolous differs from traditional art forms. This dovetails with my suggestion that time for play and pleasure without the driving intention of political activism is not often available to queers in our dominant social structures and that making room for such things can be valuable. The Met exhibit therefore offers a new timeline that values queer playfulness for its own sake. Although camp is indefinable, we can point to (and indeed we have) specific examples that seem to generate an undeniable campiness in the perceiver. As Sontag wrote: "The whole point of Camp is to dethrone the serious. Camp is playful, anti-serious. More precisely, Camp involves a new, more complex relation to 'the serious.' One can be serious about the frivolous, frivolous about the serious" (1964, p. 10). Camp appeals to the queer seeking a temporal refuge and connection in virtue of its frivolity and playfulness. This is not to say that it is apolitical, there is value in holding a space for failed seriousness in a very serious institution. As Cleto argued, camp's

ephemeral transient nature opens up the possibility for play in a way that speaks directly to the temporal aspect of valuing a playfulness that might be considered queer:

> [Camp] is a story of anachronisms, inverted signs, and words-as-spectacles; a story of multiple origins, woven into a nonprogressive line of disjointed chronology, with the friction between temporal axes making for the swinging 'play' of camp. Back and forth, and back again." (2019, p. I/17)

Being able to play and move outside of these standard boundaries offers the possibility for another artistic dimension perhaps not seen in traditional artistic frameworks. This echoes Fleischmann's and Benjy's eschewing of the serious and bland for the garish colours and laughter, showing how the opportunity to value "play" in and of itself defies chrononormativity.

Camp not only takes seriously the frivolous in a way that allows for playfulness—seldom valued in our chrononormative world—but it also defies a linear time. It floats into an unknown ether only to be accessed by the informed few, those who are perhaps positioned to be in the "know." As Sontag writes:

> The canon of Camp can change. Time has a great deal to do with it. Time may enhance what seems simply dogged or lacking in fantasy now because we are too close to it, because it resembles too closely our own everyday fantasies, the fantastic nature of which we don't perceive. We are better able to enjoy a fantasy as fantasy when it is not our own. (1964, p. 8)

To define camp, then, is to place it in a context. We must allow for this context and our relationship to the object to shift. It does not abide by linear temporality. It may be a

piece of art, a movement, action, or technique that was valued in another historical context and that has reemerged in a different time and place to take on a different relational meaning. According to Cleto: “Time itself—'the process of aging or deterioration’—was essential in transforming banality into the fantastic, in providing that rare combination of detachment and sympathy that produces camp’s ironic nostalgia for everything “old-fashioned, out-of-date, démodé” (2019, p. I/25). Regarding camp’s temporality, Heather Love suggests that it is a “backward art”: “camp, for instance, with its tender concern for outmoded elements of popular culture and its refusal to get over childhood pleasures and traumas is a backward art” (2007, p. 7). Meanings continue to shift but objects might return to foster moments that challenge linear time. This means that camp sensibility is not held down by chrononormativity. Freeman speaks of gay/camp sensibility as that which “involves thinking sex itself in the broadest terms, as the taking back of a corporeal energy otherwise devoted to work and the family” (2011, p. 52). Not only does the playfulness reemerge at traditionally inappropriate life stages, such as a playful childishness in adulthood, but valuing the frivolous, the excessive, and the pointless, also actively defies normativity. Playfulness as a mode of challenging chrononormativity will continue to infuse this dissertation, as I return to it again in the context of stick-and-poke tattoos.

Both Sontag and Cleto have settled on “camp sensibility” as a way of defining camp. As camp shifts throughout time, it depends upon contextual interpretation, and thus *who* is doing the interpreting. Throughout this thesis, I consider our perspectives to be influenced by our own subjective histories. Therefore, I suggest that when Sontag talks of a camp sensibility only afforded to the few—usually the few who eschew the

normative, particularly those who are queer—she is making room to acknowledge how some folks might be phenomenologically predisposed to recognize and revel in the queer and the camp. However, even this definition of a camp sensibility is not stable, in that "any sensibility which can be crammed into the mold of a system, or handled with rough tools of proof, is no longer a sensibility at all. It has hardened into an idea" (Sontag 1964, p. 1). My own analysis of my affective experience at the Met risks reducing the ephemeral nature of camp sensibility. At the same time, we can gesture to a pattern that has been available through the vast literature of camp.

In the Met exhibit, camp sensibility might also speak to the queer experience of belonging. A camp style is rife with affect that depends upon the subjective experience of the subject and the historical context within which it is viewed. According to Sontag "behind the straight public sense in which something can be taken, one has found a private zany experience of the thing" (1964, p. 5). To find others who share in this private experience might then create a queer sense of belonging outside of dominant social groups. Because so much of the nature of camp and how it is interpreted and experienced is subjective and dependent on the viewer, there is affective and aesthetic room to make way for a knowing that contributes to a sense of queer belonging. Sontag herself claimed that camp is "something of a private code, a badge of identity even" (1964, p. 1). When an individual is in the know, they can spot it and enact it, which creates a like-minded community. Camp must therefore be felt rather than taught and learned and this feeling is generated through a contextual collective response. As Cleto argues:

> Camp irony drastically separated insiders from outsiders, disobeying commonly shared codes of interpretation and providing recognition and

> complicity among those in the know: the more arbitrary, impertinent, or illegitimate such knowledge, the more cherished, and the greater its in-group value. Camp connoisseurship thus proved the frontier of social distinction, aggregating within (as it separated from) the privilege of the whimsical. That is what the elite is about, after all: excluding the masses. (2019, p. I/27)

This quote not only underscores why it is so difficult to interpret camp in a way that can be mapped out formulaically, but it also shows how this contributes to its esoteric nature. The nature of camp would be lost in attempts to fix its definition. However, that does not mean we cannot talk about what it can do aesthetically and affectively for its viewers and participants. Cleto further argues that camp has the capacity to implicate the viewer in a way that includes them within the artistic event:

> And both camp object and subject are made into a *situation*, a theatrical setting and scene, by taking part in the same role play in which the actors constantly refer to an extemporized 'script', and to an audience…in front of which both camp object and subject perform. (1999, p. 25)

Through its affective manner, camp relies on the interpretation and the participation of the viewer, and in doing so, it encompasses the potential to carve out a feeling of belonging. As I have argued, queer aesthetics recognizes that the uptake of art forms reflects our situated circumstances. In similar fashion, Jennifer Doyle and David Getsy argue that queer aesthetics require a "reading into" of the art that encourages a sense of queer embodiment (2013). As an artistic situation that demands interpretation from all

participants, camp requires that its perceivers and enactors *share* a queer knowledge. Shared knowledge can facilitate a sense of "being in the *k/now*," perhaps likening the experience to a sense of belonging: a temporal moment of understanding together in and through affects outside of the parameters of chrononormativity.

3.3 A Queer Phenomenological Understanding of Archives and Museums

This section examines the setting of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the fraught history of museums and archives. Alongside experiencing a romantic and campy moment with Wilde and Garland, I have been unable to shake some of my earlier concerns regarding the mainstreaming of a knowledge and sensibility so often relegated to the margins. I provide further analysis through a queer phenomenological lens of the cooptation of oppressed knowledges by a prestigious institution. First, I return to *Queer Phenomenology* and Sara Ahmed's discussion of racialized bodies and the formation of institutions to uncover the framework of whiteness that exists at the Met and through my own access to cultural institutions as a white academic subject. Following this, I explore how the archiving and display of histories and cultures in these spaces have tended to reinforce heteronormativity, racism, and colonization alongside the practice of queer curatorship. Using this analytical lens, I consider how the "Camp: Notes on Fashion" exhibit was housed within the confines of the institution of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Museums have been shaped in and through colonialism, whiteness, and academic and capitalist elitism, making them exclusionary spaces more likely to welcome middle-class white bodies.

In *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed explores how racialized individuals move throughout institutions and how institutions are not stagnant and unchangeable. Although cultural institutions have tended to perpetuate patterns of access and privilege, they have some capacity for change and transformation. Ahmed explores the problem of white proximity in these spaces: "when we describe an institution as 'being' white, we are pointing to how institutional spaces are shaped by the proximity of some bodies and not others: white bodies gather and cohere to form the edges of such spaces" (2006b, p. 132). However, Ahmed also argues that such institutions need not be reified:

> It is important that we do not reify institutions by presuming they are simply given and that they decide what we do. Rather, institutions become given as an effect of the repetition of decisions made over time, which shapes the surface of institutional spaces. Institutions involve lines, which are the accumulation of past decisions about "how" to allocate resources, as well as "who" to recruit. Recruitment functions as a technology for the reproduction of whiteness. (2006b, p. 133)

Alongside the aesthetics of the 'artistic objects' offered in any given exhibit, a phenomenological analysis helps us attend to the complex history of museums. Through such an analysis, we can see which objects come readily into view and how these frameworks reproduce patterns developed through the colonial and capitalist *status quo*. This also allows me to account for my own embodiment, as a white tourist in New York City who is relatively comfortable moving through the space that is the museum. Whiteness and my relative academic privilege implicated me in my experience at the Met. As Ahmed writes: "One fits, and in the act of fitting, the surfaces of bodies

disappear from view. White bodies are comfortable as they inhabit spaces that extend their shape" (2006b, p. 135). I suggest in fact that my whiteness was crucial to my experience of the exhibit at the Met, an institution with a history of whiteness that allows me to pass through it with relative ease. This means acknowledging my complicity in the institution. What I am offering is a subjective account of existing within a white body, even if my queerness means I have a slightly oblique perspective. However, the ease afforded by my whiteness and relative academic privilege at the Met is further complicated by the reality of my socio-economic status. Whiteness does not always entail comfortability in an elite space, particularly if, like the museum, they uphold capitalist ideals. Despite having access to the academic institution, I traveled to New York City on a meagre graduate student's budget. Class status also affects how an individual encounters the space of a museum and the objects on display. This retroactively became pertinent as I felt more aesthetically integrated into the space of a punk concert the following evening, in my second-hand clothes. I return to the thread of class and aesthetic affordability in the following chapter, as I take up the significance of the do-it-yourself ethos of punk.

Museum and archival scholarship are separate but deeply intertwined areas of study, which analyze both the institutional display and education of historical objects and the collection and research of such objects (Fleckner, 1990). Nikki Sullivan and Craig Middleton briefly unpack the nature of the traditional museum and how this tends to uphold a certain framework for determining value in art as well as knowledge, history, and traditions (2019). In the past, Western museums have tended to archive and display materials in a white and Eurocentric way. When museums highlight other cultures and

traditions, they have done so in a way that has produced a dehumanizing spectacle, reifying cultural hierarchies often with objects stolen and pillaged from these cultures (Al-Ansi, et. al, 2021). This mode of archiving and displaying has continued in many spaces. As such, this has been a nebulous and rich area of inquiry for queer studies and other marginalized groups. Sullivan and Middleton write about how the construction of the museum impacts our experiences of the world: “museums orient us in the world: they offer us ways to think, paths to follow, object lessons, and narrative positions with which to identify. And they do this through the careful staging of what is seen and what is felt” (2019, p. 43). The museum cements whose stories matter within our academic and social discourse by determining what objects are valuable through their choice of displays. In other words, the staging and placement of historical and cultural objects and artefacts create an affective experience for the viewer.

Given this history of disparate marginalization and prioritization, it is a fraught phenomenological space within which to showcase a queer exhibit. Sociologists David Embrick, Simón Weffer and Silvia Dóminguez have researched metropolitan museums via their autoethnographic experiences as People of Colour attending the Art Institute of Chicago (AIC). They conclude that alongside the collection of materials, the layout of the museum and the exhibition of artefacts and art can reinforce colonialist and oppressive frameworks, arguing that mainstream frameworks “serve to both passively and aggressively tell us who belongs and who is otherized, which groups are inferior and which groups are superior” (Embrick, et al., 2019, p. 995). When archival material is displayed in a way that preserves and highlights specific stories and cultures above

others, it manufactures a particular experience for the viewers and for their affective and phenomenological sense as they experience the exhibits.

Through years of multiple museum visits, Embrick, et al. gathered data that suggests the institution of the museum reifies whiteness in a way that creates a white sanctuary. White sanctuaries, for the researchers, are "spaces that allow whites to feel good about themselves in a world in which they might feel that whites are becoming the minority population" (2019, p. 1006). By feigning neutrality while highlighting Eurocentric artistic works, the authors conclude that the spatial configurations of the AIC have the capacity to further the stratification of race, which of course favours whiteness and white histories. Embrick et al. claim that "this is one of the defining characteristics of museums: to promote a particular history or set of histories to people in order to give them a sense of place, purpose and/or celebrate achievements" (2019 p. 996). They conclude that the layout of the AIC was conducive to promoting the values of white, Western history over all others as these are the ones displayed in easily accessible and permanent collections.

It is insufficient to simply acknowledge *whose* memories matter without exploring how this is reflected through the objects and artefacts prioritized in museums and archives. Critics and scholars explore how some materials and objects are favoured over others and this limits whose stories are archived. For queer materials are not easily found within traditional archives nor are they necessarily readily available for historical preservation. A population that has been hidden and policed has had to hide their existence in materials that fly under the radar of tradition and orthodoxy (Cvetkovich, 2003). Records of these lives may have been obscured in various ways, from being

destroyed by family members to having to be decoded in personal documents such as letters and diaries. Ann Cvetkovich discusses the importance of grassroots efforts to develop an archive that values unorthodox and quotidian materials as integral to queer history. She specifically focuses on the unique grassroots nature of the Lesbian Herstory Archives (LHA) in New York City. The LHA enacts a policy to accept all donations from any and all lesbians that come to their door (Cvetkovich, 2003, p. 243). In doing so, the archive holds a complex variety of materials that commemorate the diversity of lived lesbian lives. The LHA was started by a need to document memories of histories and lives that have been excluded from typical archival databases (Cvetkovich, 2003, p. 241). This unique counter-archive was created out of a need to document an ignored and silenced history and demonstrates the power held by traditional archival institutions, such as spaces like the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It gestures to the ways in which these spaces have historically constituted not only what we know, insofar as it has been saved via the archives, but has emphasized what is important *to* know.

I note here a personal anecdote that takes me back to my own travel experience of going to New York City. Having encountered Cvetkovich's *Archive of Feelings*, I was determined to explore the Lesbian Herstory Archives. As we were only in the city for a short period of time, our schedule did not align with the LHA's limited hours of operation. Despite attempting to arrange an appointment via email, we were unable to explore this archival space of lesbian history. The Met, however, was comparatively easy to access. While this is only one incident, it reflects the disparity between a well-funded institution and a grassroots organization that is run by volunteers and through donations. I cannot fault the LHA for not opening its doors for only two people in the middle of the

summer. As it is volunteer run, the open hours correspond to the volunteers' availabilities.

Meanwhile, The Met held a world-renowned gala with A-list attendees paying roughly $30,000-$50,000 per ticket, raising close to $13 million to support the 150-year-old institution (Hoffower & Davis, 2020). Cvetkovich reminds us that: "An archive's budget must pay not only for its collection but for space and access, including staff to receive visitors and, even more importantly to catalog the collection" (2003, p. 246). Funding impacts who gets to attend these spaces as well as whose memories and lives are archived. Funding affects whose lives are commemorated by acknowledging what might attract visitors and thus what is in a sense marketable. Scholar and GLBTQ Historical Society member, Don Romesburg, discusses the limitations this might have on representation in that:

> Genuinely inclusive collection, preservation, and organization are expensive and time-consuming…. Without constant and specific diligence, however, holdings will always veer toward those most likely to have the space, time, and sense of entitlement to claim a place in history—often well-connected white, gay men. (2014, p. 135)

Notably, groups who have the time, energy, and resources to contribute to these exhibits are more likely to foreground their experiences and histories. A museum such as the Met has been funded by those with power and privilege. We can see through Anna Wintour's role and the media frenzy surrounding the Met Gala that this is generally still the case for the Met. This might mean, however, that by the very nature of archival and museum practices and by the complex nature of history, archives and museums will always be

exclusive to some degree. But this does not mean we ought not to work towards queering the institution in a way that makes spaces for the stories of the marginalized. Indeed, many scholars and historians are doing just that.

Queer curatorship studies explore the multivalent nature of how the presentation of artefacts, alongside the uniqueness of the chosen artefacts, affect the museumgoers' experiences as well as how knowledge is commemorated and valued. As demonstrated by my experience at the Met, curation can manufacture our affective experiences in relation to the objects on display. The unique subjectivity of each museumgoer means there are always multiple perspectives. However, given our North American chrononormative frameworks and contexts, curatorial choices also have the potential to reify a linear trajectory of the histories presented to us. Jennifer Tyburczy writes on how queer curatorship is:

> Simultaneously a mode for studying how museums place objects in normative sexual relationships through the curatorial citation and repetition of familiar arrangements, juxtapositions, and chronologies, and a method for experimenting with object arrangements toward the cultivation of other sexual-social relationships. (Tyburczy, 2013, p. 121)

Moving through a curated space has the potential to reinforce or to challenge the construction of epistemologies and whose life histories we value. How the objects are found and are placed in relation to one another deeply affects the overall experience of the viewer participant. I argue that the Camp exhibit at the Met provided a queerly curated experience while also risking the flattening out of queer and camp sensibilities into a heteronormative logic.

3.4 An Archive of Complicated Feelings: Rainbow Capitalism at the Met

It feels notable that this exhibit was held in New York City. I made a journey to the historic heart of North American queer activism, generally attributed to the 1969 Stonewall Riots (Armstrong & Crage, 2006), but also to the political history of AIDS activism as the epicenter of ACT UP (Schulman, 2021). Queer tourism offers the queer tourist the promise of a feeling of belonging and identity-formation: "These (usually urban spaces) are coded as homelands…gay meccas offer sites of pilgrimage to gay tourists…In doing so, they often fulfill the gay tourist's yearning for a sense of 'coming home'" (Waitt & Markwell, 2006, p. 171). It also presupposes a queer market that appeals to queers with capital. The riots that took place at the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village now form part of a queer genealogy and kinship for many queers. Thus, the Met strategically held this exhibit during the summer of Stonewall's 50th anniversary, to which the Costume Institute was paying homage. These elements were integral to setting the proverbial stage for a feeling of queer belonging. At the same time, however, this is part and parcel of a growing trend of queer marketability.

There is something worth questioning about this packaging of belonging offered by the Met. To what degree can the Met be aligned with Fleischmann and Benjy's artistic creations? To what degree was the Met capitalizing on the pink-dollar? On the one hand, by placing the Wildean-inspired Gucci garments from 2017 alongside the inscriptions detailing the trials of Oscar Wilde, the Met pushed artistic and temporal boundaries reminding the participant that like many of us now, Wilde was out of step with the norms of the late nineteenth century. On the other hand, this installation may also be suggesting that queer deviancy and creativity are valuable because these can be sold. The Met

Gala—as it embraced Kylie Jenner as a camp icon—produced in me a certain cynicism alongside my appreciation of the exhibit. Queerness is continually becoming commodified in a way that may serve a capitalist ideal without working to deconstruct our system of capitalist heteronormativity. As a visitor and traveler, I was swept up by the magnificence of it all. The curators brilliantly put together a queer timeline that nevertheless did not evade a capitalist framework. How do we show an appreciation for what the Met achieved while also critiquing the exhibit's privileging of luxury camp items and its appropriation of queer subcultures?

This tension produces an archive of complicated feelings. The Met exhibit's promoting of camp suggests that queer and camp histories are worthy of commemoration in a North American capitalist society. Although the popularity of camp has ebbed and flowed over time within mainstream pop and art culture, its movement from the margins to the mainstream in this context is significant. On the one hand, this exhibit could be seen as having the capacity to queer the museum and make room for the odd and the divergent within the institutions of high culture in traditional institutions. On the other hand, it could be that the nature of placing queer artifacts in the museum is diluting their subversive potential. My position remains unresolved: much like the complex sensibilities of camp and queer themselves, I suggest that both perspectives have value.

Romesburg, like Cvetkovich, acknowledges that mainstream archival institutions and museums are increasingly staging LGBTQ exhibitions. He argues that these are indeed valuable in recognizing queer history: "mainstream museums increasingly mount GLBT-related shows and will always play a crucial role in winning converts, solidifying GLBT legitimacy, and creating threads for our belonging in the tapestry of history"

(2014, p. 131). By including something as elusive as camp, the Met makes way for legitimizing an ephemeral style created and expressed by those who have lived in the margins. Romesburg suggests that this inclusion can affirm the non-normative rather than flattening out queer history: “simply bearing witness to the struggles for access to civil rights, markets, subcultures, relationships, bodies, and psyches can affirm queer lives beyond narratives of normativity” (2014, p. 137). This begs the question of whether validation from traditional frameworks renders the non-normative normative. Certainly, museums and archives are meant for the preservation of histories and knowledges and for educating the greater public offering visitors a unique opportunity to “try on the complexities of subjugated knowledges with intense, cursory, and/critical engagement” (Romesburg, 2014, p. 138). The Met managed this by highlighting the artistic brilliance of queerness and queer creators in a way that did not merely prioritize a history of tragedy (although it was indeed present), but also made room for joy. As we have come to hear and see representations of the tragic queer figure time and again, the celebration of our accomplishments, even if they were not always celebrated in their original contexts, offers a fresh perspective. At the same time, as we shall see, Elizabeth Whitney and Rosemary Hennessy offer poignant critiques of the growing economy of queer and camp that might give us pause. Reflecting upon my experience as an attendee of the exhibit, indeed having watched the Met Gala unfold months before, I have sat and continue to sit with many of these uncomfortable feelings.

In a 2006 performative essay, Whitney provides a self-reflexive and autoethnographic account of her navigation of the blossoming market of rainbow capitalism. In an aside, Whitney writes:

> *This, I thought, is the moral for the heterosexual consumption of queer America: Queer identity is acceptable as a product, as a performance that offers partial entry into the world of an "other," as long as this performance remains under the unpredictable jurisdiction of heteronormativity.* (2006, p. 38 emphasis in original)

Given that queerness has become mainstreamed in a multitude of complicated ways over the past couple of decades--to name a few examples, the exponential growth of the popularity of *RuPaul's Drag Race* has garnered numerous spinoffs, both *The L Word* and *Queer Eye* have been rebooted and LGBTQ characters in TV series and movies are becoming the norm, much of it appears to be consumed by straight people. In parallel fashion, non-queer attendees of the 2019 Met Gala worked to embrace a camp sensibility[7]. It is not too far-fetched to consider the possibility that camp as a tourist attraction, even beyond queer tourism, was a clever marketing move. Whitney notes that as gender roles are ever-shifting, elements of queer camp become more in-vogue with those outside of queer communities. Performing "otherness" in a relatively privileged identity can often be an attempt to receive validation from the fringes of society, offering some entry "into the world of an 'other'" (Whitney, 2006, p. 38). With its global appeal, the Met's exhibit on camp certainly profited from its subject-matter.

Whitney's reflection paper offers the reader a complex array of feelings brought on by consuming rainbow-laden products. She writes:

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[7] However, Chatzipapatheodoridis (2019) reminds us that camp can be a tool for anyone who feels burdened by the constraints of the gender-binary, whether or not they identify as queer or gender-variant.

> I grapple with a desire to embrace and appreciate camp as it is historically linked to queer culture and has acted as a vehicle for queer political agendas in the face of mainstream assimilation that often occurs once a cultural phenomenon is recognized as potentially marketable and profitable. That recognition and subsequent assimilation usually leads to a loss of subversive power and the recognition that once a cultural phenomenon is recognized by the mainstream as subversive, it may lose this same subversive power by default, and through assimilation. (2006, p. 37)

The exhibit both plays with historical timelines and follows a linear trajectory in mapping the progression of LGBTQIA2+ rights from the persecution of Victorian era cross-dressers, Stella and Fanny (Exhibit Catalogue, 2019), to a giant room showcasing vast fashion ensembles inspired by and celebrating camp. According to critics Vanessa Friedman and Robert Smith, while the first two thirds of the exhibit ground the discussion of camp in the specific contexts, the last room lacks this historical grounding (2019). This otherworldly and immaterial context of a camp-filled room presents a possible out-of-time utopian moment of queer celebration. However, this queer utopian moment may also obfuscate current LGBT+ struggles.

In *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism*, Rosemary Hennessy explores how queer camp and style are often presented through clothes and marketable products, which also highlights the disparities of who has access to performing and exploring their queer visibility. According to Hennessy, increased commodity culture in late capitalism uses marketing strategies to make camp and drag performativity accessible mainly through purchasing power. Hennessy suggests that this is a new

"homosexual/queer spectacle" which "perpetuates a class-specific perspective that keeps invisible the capitalist divisions of labor that organize sexuality and in particular lesbian, gay, queer lives. In so doing, queer spectacles participate in a long history of class-regulated visibility" (2017, p. 138). In this prioritizing of queer visibility through a fashion and style that are only accessible via a capitalist economy, camp style for those on the margins is not necessarily easily achieved. This echoes some of the tenets of the Art for Art's Sake movement and Wilde's denouncement of the industrial revolution as destroying the culture of unique objects and replacing it with the reproducible object. One-of-a-kind objects are only available to those with the necessary capital. What does this mean then for the queers who do not have access to the camp style shown on display through the haute couture designs? Does having this exhibit contribute to the idea that queerness is also an elite identity that can be purchased if one only has the capital? To what extent does the exhibit promote a progress narrative that is aligned with a capitalist path and timeline? Indeed, Whitney cautions us to not "confuse the drive toward firmly planting camp in mainstream aesthetics with equality and freedom from oppression" (2006, p. 37). It remains important to acknowledge the deep entanglement of queer camp and capitalism.

In "All Power to All People?: Black LGBTTI2QQ Activism, Remembrance, and Archiving in Toronto," Syrus Marcus Ware discusses the limitations of normative timelines upon BIPOC trans bodies alongside museum and archival representations. He argues that the attempt to straighten these histories in a particular way serves to fit them into institutionalized whiteness and colonialism:

> the classic archive structure—and I'm speaking here primarily about white trans and queer archives—is the allegedly neutral disembodied collection of objects that create and inscribe a narrative of struggle and resistance that always begins with whiteness and that is used too often in the service of homonationalism, gay imperialism… and the vilification of the less progressive other. (2017, p. 171)

Although viewers at the Met exhibit on camp may be buoyed up by its progress narrative through various camp objects, these objects participate in various Eurocentric traditions. As Ahmed has argued, objects do not arrive in any space neutrally. Even the inclusion of the figure of Oscar Wilde brings forth a fraught history. Wilde's camp tastes and aesthetics have a deep and problematic history grounded in orientalism (Xiaoyi, 1997) which, although excluded in the exhibit, should nevertheless be recognized as part of Wilde's legacy in order to overcome white insularity and dominance in queer community and belonging. Furthermore, there has been little research done on the prevalence of Black camp even within the vast discourses on camp and it was noticeably left out of the exhibition. Ware also reminds us that a different temporality is necessary to consider trans BIPOC lives:

> Trans lives of color follow a different temporality: we fail the progress narrative espoused by the white trans movement, as advancement is typically reduced to acquiring "rights" that are inaccessible to most and in fact are wielded against so many on the margins of the margins through the prison industrial complex, the war on terror, and the aid development industry. (2017, p. 172)

The objects highlighted in the exhibit have arrived there in virtue of their contribution to the hierarchization of races, cultures, and knowledges. This tends to occlude the celebration of Black camp objects while presenting the false idea that progress has been made.

Black Camp was not only ignored in this particular exhibition, but Fabio Cleto's reader on camp aesthetics, *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader* contains very little analysis on the intersections of race and sexual identity in performing or encompassing camp aesthetics. The inclusion of Pamela Robertson's article: "Mae West's Maids: Race, 'Authenticity' and the Discourse of Camp" gives us some indication as to how discussions of camp have created discourses that equate whiteness with camp and queerness, whereas Black subjects have only ever been seen as alluding to camp without embodying it. Indeed, Robertson seems to be suggesting that in some situations, with regards to Mae West, camp sensibility resembles performing Blackness without blackface (Robertson, 1999).

In their journal issue "Notes on the Uses of Black Camp," Anna Pochmara and Justyna Wierzchowska explore how analyses of camp should include attention paid to racialized contexts, so that camp does not become a means for unproblematic pleasure (2017, p. 698). They argue that "the assumption that camp aesthetics provides uncritical pleasure is a key reason which has led Black Studies scholars to reject it as an ineffective tool" (2017, p. 697). Arguably, the Met exhibit elides the multi-faceted nature of camp by reducing it merely to its role in exclusively Eurocentric and white cultures. Apart from nods to Black voguing artist, Willi Ninja, via a belt by Jeremy Scott (a white designer) and some allusions to the subversive Black designer, Dapper Dan, the absence of Black

camp at the 2019 exhibition was stark. The contributions to Camp cultures of Black artists, designers, and performers, as well as more specifically Black camp sensibilities, were generally left unacknowledged. Designers such as Patrick Kelly, who enjoyed a successful but truncated career due to a young death from AIDS complications, were not present at the Met. Regarding the camp of Patrick Kelly, Sequoia Barnes argues that:

> Black style has always been inherently camp…[Black people] have always taken whiteness and the gaze and either appropriated "white" styles or counter-appropriated white assumptions by exaggerating and disrupting their definitions of what it means to be white and what they think it means to be black, particularly through dandyism. (2017, p. 688)

Camp generally and Black camp especially have been deeply embedded in Black queer culture as a tool for challenging the fundamental notions of both race and gender. This abundant history and ongoing practice within Black queer communities makes its exclusion from this world-renowned exhibit problematic. As we know that Black queer and trans people were integral to movements such as the Stonewall Riots, which this exhibit commemorated, the lack of Black art should be seen as inexcusable, contributing to a falsely white-washed history of queer struggle.

Alongside the absence of racial awareness, little attention was paid to the complexities of class and queerness. Elitist academic and colonial frameworks of knowledge permeate influential institutions such as museums. Many fashion archives and museum exhibitions have focused solely on fashion from haute couture brands featuring elitist figures. Queer fashion theorists Kelly Reddy-Best and Dana Goodin problematize the elitism of fashion exhibits through their research on Midwestern queer style and

fashion. In “Queer Fashion and Style: Stories from the Heartland – Authentic Midwestern Queer Voices through a Museum Exhibition” (2020), they argue that in North American queer discourse, fashion and style are often associated with the coastal and metropolitan regions of the United States, particularly New York City, San Francisco and Los Angeles. While style and fashion in these geographical spaces do not exist in isolated silos, there is little discussion of the day-to-day sartorial choices and experiences of queers outside of these haute couture and metropolitan fashion contexts: “the bicoastal emphasis or focused attention on New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco in the field of queer studies creates an imagined future where queer life cannot exist or thrive outside these enclaves” (Reddy-Best & Goodin, 2020, p. 116). Given that this exhibit focuses on figures and fashions from New York, London, Paris, and Berlin, highlighting camp contributions from Sontag, Wilde, and Isherwood, it fails to provide insight into the queer camp that might have been created from the less privileged. Is camp, as framed by both Sontag and Wilde, only accessible to those with monetary resources? I am not convinced of this: I hypothesize that the everyday style of lower-class queers is also deeply invigorated by a camp sensibility. As mentioned, I think the DIY nature of punk aesthetics can overcome some of these qualms.

3.5 Conclusion: Unresolved Feelings

My specific positionality in relation to this exhibit constitutes a very narrow experience. This does not mean that it does not offer meaningful knowledge about potential spaces of queer belonging. My experience was mediated by the rich and diverse history of queer camp and visual aesthetics in New York as points of connection. As I am a white person,

the accessibility and comfort level of an institution such as an art museum is open to my movement throughout the space. I continue to reflect on how this connects to the distinct affects of queer joy, particularly in a space rife with fraught histories of how objects come into view. Is it possible that I transcended time and space into my very own queer time? My doing so would also hinge on the troubling erasure of excluded Black queer voices. I heed this discomfort as a reminder that when belonging is offered to us and curated by mainstream institutions, further reflection can highlight the potential limitations of what is presented to us.

Given my embodied, affective, and phenomenological grounding, my experience of this exhibit on camp is mediated by my subjective experience. I bring forth a particular and contingent perspective that affects how I interpret the exhibit's pieces. My experience is thus a partial and incomplete story. And while during those moments I felt something quite profound, it is not clear that these feelings have been maintained upon reflection. Perhaps their ephemerality is a part of the magic. I have suggested that the nature of camp aesthetics has helped to remap my relationship to temporality, but I fear the danger of attempting to step out of time. This is especially important as I have considered the context and history of the museum as an institution and the luxury haute couture items on display. That is, they are always temporally located even as a camp sensibility works to challenge linear temporality. Despite the nature of camp as slowing down time, looking backward or forward, these objects' material realities are still necessarily tethered to a particular context. This echoes the materials Fleischmann and Benjy used to create "Squirt!". In their case, the reflective sheets were given to a friend to use and the cans of *Squirt* required were consumed by friends, as the artists were aware

that they were still embedded in capitalism and in a framework of continued wastefulness.

While the campy objects in the exhibit and their capacity to subvert linear time was exciting, I am troubled by the exhibit's *uncritical* participation in capitalism. If a complex queer joy acknowledges that this world is insufficient for queer and trans people, so too should the art that imbues us with this affect. Given the complexity of the nature of camp and camp sensibility, I do not think it feasible to determine with certainty whether camp can do this. However, I think that within the confines of the Met exhibit, the capacity to experience queer joy as I have defined it remains truncated. This does not mean the affect of queer temporal belonging was meaningless. Rather, it might indicate that there is something more palpable about the joy queers create for themselves outside of these institutions and through their own art. Of course, this line is not easy to draw, and indeed most of the art at the exhibit was likely created by queers, but given its grounding in exclusionary institutions, something important is missing. I do not intend to imply that queer-focused art outside of the museum will comprise a joyful experience to all participants. There are still a multitude of ways that queer-led artworks and exhibitions can be exclusionary.

Phenomenologically, we are located within our material realities and carry the weight of our histories. Capitalism, colonialism, heteronormativity and racism still prevail as the dominant frameworks through which we must operate. Highlighting camp in the museum exhibition does, however, remind us that art has the capacity to contribute to an affect of queer joy and belonging and otherworldliness. While camp can show a distaste for mass production and the dominant zeitgeist, it is not necessarily free from the

charges of elitism, racism, and capitalism. While this exhibit was fraught with imperfections, there still exist glimmers of possibility—that is, if you are affectively predisposed to looking for them. While the exhibit's exclusionary nature developed within a largely colonial institution makes this less accessible to racialized groups and folks of lower classes, this means the limitations of the affective value of this experience must be recognized. It is worth inquiring how marginalized groups have been working to create joy and belonging for *themselves*. I continue to hold the memory of the Met exhibit with tenderness, albeit alongside conflicted and complex emotions. While it was imperfect, it has served to develop my critical responses and has provided tools for exploration in the following chapters.

Chapter 4

4 "Ladies and Gentlemen and Everything In-Between:" *Queer Joy* and *Belonging* in Live Punk Performance[8]

The Metropolitan Museum of Art offered a mainstream uptake of many underground queer art cultures, having them resurface in the halls of the museum and through the Met Gala to a plethora of media outlets. This next exploration takes us into the caverns of the underground itself, where queers continue to gather to scream and dance along to punk songs. During the summer of 2019, queercore band *Hunx and His Punx* began a tour at a sold-out show in an indie concert venue called "Elsewhere" in Brooklyn, New York. While in the city, I had the opportunity to witness the band's raunchy performance that brought the audience and the performers together in queer joy and belonging. As I have outlined, queer joy and queer belonging can be fostered through aesthetics that work to challenge our normative conception of temporality. The unique assemblage of queer and punk aesthetics at the live *Hunx* performance worked to create a space and time in which queer subjects could release themselves from chrononormative timelines that constrain our queer bodies.

I begin by engaging with the limitations of retelling the story of a live performance from memory and from my singular point of view. However, I work to provide an account of that evening which highlights relevant aesthetics through a temporal lens to show how they converge to create an alternate, queer temporality. Next,

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[8] This chapter includes revised content from a previously published paper in *Panic at the Discourse: An Interdisciplinary Journal,* entitled "Taking a moment: Embodying temporality and finding a 'Queer sense of belonging' through live performance" (Keating, 2022).

I uncover a brief history of the "queercore" genre and movement alongside an account of the band, *Hunx and His Punx.* Following this, I discuss the "liveness" of the show as being pertinent to its queerness by creating a *communitas* and allowing the subjects to encounter the present aesthetics alongside a queer aesthetics of *liveness*. These aesthetic elements include *Hunx's* embodiment of the DIY (do-it-yourself) ethos of queercore through their punk clothing and the queer gesture and confrontations during two specific song performances as enacted by the band's frontman, Seth Bogart. Finally, through a lens of fat temporalities, I argue that the revered presence of the band's bassist, Shannon Shaw creates a time of belonging for queer fat bodies. This one-of-a-kind collection of aesthetic attributes specific to *Hunx and His Punx* live in Brooklyn in 2019 forged an ephemeral queer temporality and space ripe for queer belonging and queer joy.

4.1 Reflection on Memory and Personal Limitations

My discussion of this concert is a gesture of remembering and memorialization. While attending the performance, I did not intend to write about this event and was thus not taking detailed field notes. However, attending the performance as a queer person seeking aesthetic and emotional connection through art, rather than foregrounding my position as a researcher, fostered total immersion in the experience. While there might be specific details that have been lost over time, I was able to experience the full atmosphere of queer punk aesthetics in that moment, situating myself in a *now-ness* that might not have been available to the more detached researcher. Because of this immersion in queer belonging and joy, I became motivated to reflect on what elements were present to generate such a powerful experience. I attempt to detail an accurate picture of the live

performance after having worked through the autoethnographic practice of *emotional recall* (Ellis and Boechner, 2000), wherein the practitioner works to situate themselves back in the experience to recall the feelings of that specific time. This practice goes beyond simply remembering what occurred, but according to Ellis and Bochner, is a practice "in which [the autoethnographer] imagines being back in the scene emotionally and physically. If you can revisit the scene emotionally, then you remember other details" (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p. 752). I exercised emotional recall by returning to the photographs I took at the concert alongside further discussion about the event with my companion. Through its memory, I always return to the same feelings: I am enraptured by queer joy and belonging. Indeed, like the queer futurity Jose Estéban Muñoz describes in *Cruising Utopia*, the feelings linger with me beyond the length of the performance (2009).

I attempt to reconstruct the affective moments of the concert while recognizing the inherent challenges of writing about live performance. Performance theorist Jill Dolan discusses the flawed nature of speaking about past performances in her book *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater*:

> We rely on reviewers and their idiosyncratic reports of what they see not only to reconstruct the content and form of a given performance, but also to gain at least a glimmer of how it might have made the audience (and the performance, by virtue of their motivating presence) *feel*. We write best about those performances we've been privileged to see. But part of the challenge of writing about performance as a public practice, one that circulates extensively and has some social impact, is to make it

> live well beyond itself, to hold it visually in memory, to evoke it with words, and to share it widely, so that its effects and potential might be known. (2005, p. 9)

Dolan attends to how accounts of past live performances necessarily rely on memory, which is fallible. Through my imperfect memory, I reflect on affective moments that are necessarily from my own situated point of view, as I have asserted through queer phenomenology that we come to objects, like art and aesthetics, through our embodiment (Ahmed, 2006b). Furthermore, Dolan suggests the retelling of an event is subject to the limitations of language, which will always fall short of the actual experience. I retell significant aspects from my perspective and work to give a description with critical self-reflection, recognizing that my understandings of the events are open to reinterpretation. Despite this, as Muñoz and Dolan theorize, the live performance slips away into ephemerality (2009; 2005). Even as we cannot capture it with full accuracy, I pay attention to how the event made me *feel*, and how this feeling remains through the retellings, even just as glimmers, like Dolan mentions. Therefore, I return my attention to affect and queer phenomenology, which allow for the validity of *feelings* as knowledge. I also bring forth the work done by performance theorists Jack Pryor, Lisa Blackman, and Muñoz. Each of these thinkers theorizes the significant affective experiences that can originate within a theatre or venue and stay with us beyond the moments of the live performance.

It would also be remiss not to acknowledge the ways in which enjoying a concert space in a heavily gentrified area is relevant to my experience. The performance, while showcasing a DIY and punk ethos, also consisted of a band with white members taking up space in a venue in the borough of Brooklyn, New York, an area notoriously known

for displacing People of Colour (Chronopolous, 2016). Gentrification is a capitalist and colonialist tool that is not negated by virtue of the space being ‘queer.’ Dereka Rushbrook argues that cities will flaunt their “diverse” neighbourhoods to attract tourists by prioritizing an image of accepting ‘queerness,’ (2002). Scholar Rae Rosenberg also notes how queer spaces can often be unsafe and explicitly exclusionary for LGBTQ People of Colour. White queers become objects of consumption for tourists, further vilifying and displacing racialized LGBTQ populations (Rosenberg, 2016). Thus, my whiteness indeed plays a role in my feeling of comfort in this time and space and in my capacity to travel to New York for the concert in the first place.

Nonetheless, I want to emphasize the importance of shifting temporalities in the face of capitalism. Perhaps the modes of temporal resistance were not resonant with all subjects in attendance. Yet, I am showing that live performance has the potential to shift temporalities in important ways for queer bodies. In response to Lee Edelman’s “No Future,” Muñoz argues for the importance of futurity for queerness (2009). Queer utopia is futurity, according to Muñoz, because the present moment of racist colonial heteropatriarchy creates a framework within which utopia becomes impossible and imagining a future for queers of colour is a necessary political gesture (2009, p. 112). As such, I do not claim that this instant encapsulated a moment of utopic anticipatory illumination for futurity but rather a momentary reprieve for particular bodies. Normative time and space was temporarily reconfigured through an assemblage of elements that allowed me to ‘take a moment’ (Keating, 2022).

4.2 Arriving Elsewhere

On the evening of the show, my companion and I arrived at "Elsewhere," the indie concert space in Brooklyn, New York, drained from the night before and the weighty expectations to make the most of our precious vacation time. Although we had toyed with skipping the show in favour of an early night, we were compelled to attend. Seeing *Hunx and His Punx* in concert was the initial motivation for booking the tickets to New York City. It brought me to the physical location of a rich queer history of arts and culture, a history I had prior felt only from a distance. In our thrifted clothes, my friend and I noted our low energy. We slumped across concrete slabs in the outdoor smoking section to stay away from the effervescent crowd anticipating the performance inside. As the show was about to begin, disparate groups of smokers filed through the venue doors. Resigning ourselves to being the last to enter, we made our way into the portal of queer punk.

Upon entering, we became participants in a sweaty and animated crowd packing the venue. My exhaustion began to dissipate. We watched Bogart make his way to the stage in full leather and black sunglasses. His leather jacket had been hand-painted: a large emblem of a wildcat and the words "man-eater" covered his back. His "*Punx*" were in similar outfits that also included leather, patches, and refashioned garments with painted-on illustrations and symbols. Bassist Shannon Shaw was crowned with a platinum bouffant updo and bold winged eyeliner visible from the back of the venue, also in black leather and mesh. Erin Emslie drummed to the fast-paced instrumentals in a patched vest with Winehouse-esque beehive hair. Audience participants screamed the lyrics alongside one another. Between songs, we cheered for Bogart as he finished a can of beer and stripped off his leather pants to reveal a leopard-print thong. Feeding off the

excitement materializing between the audience and performers, Bogart yelled to the crowd: “Who here is queer?” which was met with uproarious and affirmative hollers.

Bogart effeminately floated and danced around the stage in his thong, singing and interacting with his bandmates and the crowd. He showcased his co-performers individually, but upon introducing Shaw, the crowd cheered the loudest. Throughout the show, the setlist included the simple yet queerly provocative hit: “Everyone’s a Pussy, Fuck You Dude,” in which the lyrics only contain the title scream-sung multiple times, and a similar tune, “Don’t Call Me Fabulous” in which Shaw’s raspy vocals are layered over more distorted power chords: “Don’t call me fabulous! Fabulous! Fabulous! Oh my god!” she sings repeatedly. Bogart insisted to the crowd and co-performers that the band play “Fabulous” three times consecutively. Although this is but a fraction of the event, in my view, these facets facilitated stepping outside of the friction felt by queer bodies in the face of chrononormativity, opening up the possibility for a queer sense of belonging. Ultimately, I found a moment of queer joy in which the temporal limitations of our planned trip had dissolved; and in which queer existence did not rely upon a paycheck, assimilation, or the constant struggle to heal trauma. I felt a renewed energy, dancing and jumping along with the audience to the queercore music. The audience laughed and sang with the performers, creating a moment and memory I can return to in its various iterations.

Recalling my discussion of a “queer sense of belonging” throughout my introduction, I again bring forth this particular section from *Cruising Utopia.* Muñoz reflects on a punk show he attended while discussing the queer potentialities of stage

performances and art. Expecting to feel as though he was not a part of the 'proper' crowd gathering at the shows, he was moved by another feeling:

> I remember the Cat's Cradle in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and seeing my favorite bands there during the relentless social tedium of graduate school. That is where I started to feel too old to go to shows yet nevertheless felt the show and stage, the transformation of time and space offered by the performance, as forgiving and still permitting me access to this network of *queer belongings*. (2009, p. 108, emphasis mine)

Rather than feeling too old, Muñoz felt that he belonged in this setting. He credits his ability to access this "network" to the performance's shifting of temporalities. I suggest that this feeling of "belonging" is the possible reprieve for which I, as a queer subject, have been searching and highlighting throughout this thesis. It is demonstrated through T Fleischmann's engagement with the work of Félix González-Torres, and even throughout parts of the exhibition at the Met: the aesthetics present valued a temporal otherwise not afforded to queers through chrononormativity, a moment of time which might offer some reprieve from normativity's imposed embodied discordance. Indeed, I believe that this *feeling* was ultimately found through attending and participating in this live performance of *Hunx and His Punx.* As with Muñoz, I felt that the performance transformed "time and space" (2009, p. 108). During his reflections on his experience, Muñoz imagined feeling out of place, but he was made comfortable by how temporality was reframed. Had this not occurred, he might have indeed felt "too old" (2009, p. 108). A queer sense of belonging is thus connected to existing on a different temporal plane where we do not value time based on a linear futurity through heteronormativity or through maximizing

our labour and efficiency. In these spaces, perhaps we feel our bodies—always at the mercy of trying to keep up with chrononormativity—ease a little. As I became reinvigorated at *Hunx and His Punx,* it was as though I had shifted into a new time created by the performers and audience.

4.3 *Hunx and His Punx* and a Brief History of Queercore

An amateur video found on YouTube shows queer camp icon John Waters introducing the band *Hunx and His Punx* to the stage at a music festival in Oakland, California, in 2018. His introduction is raunchy, trashy, and humorous, characteristic of Waters himself, but it also provides a colourful picture of the band. He stumbles over some words and refers every now and then to notes on a clipboard, but his perverse admiration of the performers demands our attention. Waters announces to the crowd:

> Next up, god, Seth Bogart. His moustache fucked mine, you know? He kind of looks like a younger, more handsome version of me after he fucked Peewee Herman. Shannon, she's a stun-gun of a big-boned beauty, right? She shows no fear. She's like Little Bo Peep and Divine on steroids – and Ethel Merman with a transplanted larynx that's stolen from a tipsy Adele. Both helped celebrate my birthday in Detroit at the El Club along with the rest of the Punx and put the "X" in X-rated. Their name is "X" like in extreme, exhaustingly sexy. They're the bastard offspring of musical incest, [indecipherable], *Panty-Raid*, and *Punkettes* – all Seth's babies. Believe me, he's like Phil Spector with a heart and a hard-on. The Hunx and the Punx – they eat makeup! They sniff glue! They dress like proud rejects of *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls*! They're punk! They're pop!

> They're both pussy and prick friendly. Ladies and gentlemen and everything in between… Hunx and His Punx! (Psychogeezer, 2018)

Such an introduction of the band aligns them with the Watersesque detritus of kitschy and queer punk and alternative subcultures. By naming the queer icon Divine, and the socially-maligned figure and film with cult followings, Peewee Herman and *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls,* respectively, and controversially invoking Phil Spector, *Hunx* is decidedly a deviant outfit. They live up to this depraved picture when they reach the stage and Bogart jokingly purports that he did, in fact, "fuck Peewee Herman *and* Fred Schneider" to a laughing audience in a shirt that says "100% Fruit" (Psychogeezer, 2018). I include this introduction because of the endorsement that Waters offers by uttering these words. Moreover, it also presents a picture of the niche artistic and musical aesthetics embodied by the band. Waters' introductory references span decades, genres, and aesthetic styles, hinting at a new temporal space that emerges from the idiosyncratic combination of these influences. The video is fun to watch, but it is a bit awkward, and the amateur nature of the recording does not capture the sound well, giving the effect of a high-school garage-band practice. While a band of teenagers practicing their distorted guitar in a garage might fit into the *Hunx* queercore aesthetic, the medium flattens the experience. As the viewer is removed from the immediacy of this performance, this video clip cannot convey the same moment of queer belonging and joy that I felt at Elsewhere in 2019.

I consider the genre of music to be pertinent to this temporal discussion. Curran Nault provides an overview of queercore as a movement that developed in the late 1980s, reacting to the evolution of the broader punk music movement (Nault, 2018). Punk

manifested as a subculture against any type of establishment, including gender, capitalism, normativity, and corrupt governing bodies. Eventually, it became saturated with white heterosexual men who quickly appropriated the punk aesthetics to reinforce heteromasculinity (Nault, 2018). Further punk subcultures diverted into white nationalist and masculinist movements making certain streams unsafe for women, queer people, and People of Colour. As a result, 'riot grrrl' and feminist punk bands emerged, such as Bikini Kill and L7. Concurrently, an intersecting but different project took form: queercore. Like "punk" more broadly, queercore scorned industrialism, capitalism, authority, and mainstream success. Queercore artists and their projects specifically targeted heteronormativity and normative gender roles. They embraced a DIY (do-it-yourself) ethos "regardless of skill and resources" (Nault, 2018, p. 14), making the means of creation and publishing available to the masses. Music was self-produced, and visual art and writing were distributed through homemade zines. Queercore clothing and art found materials to reuse the waste of capitalism by "salvaging and repurposing the refuse of domestic working-class life" (Nault, 2018, p. 11). The movement's incorporation of amateur creativity alongside the use of everyday materials "creates a low barrier for participation" (Nault, 2018, p. 15). These elements make the aesthetic of punk more accessible to precarious classes, such as working-class or low-income queers. In this world, thrift is encouraged, subverting the high-end culture of fashion and aesthetics displayed at the Met.

Borne out of the queercore movement that has maintained underground cultures since the 1980s, *Hunx and His Punx* has been an ephemeral band that comes together and drifts apart and has done so since its first inception in 2008 (Holslin, 2016). While

various members have joined and quit, Shannon Shaw, Seth Bogart and Erin Emslie continue to be mainstays of the lineup, while Bogart seems to be the primary creative brainpower behind the music. Sporadic interviews and small indie magazine features depict the band's spotted history of touring sleazy venues and alcohol-fueled debauchery from their origins into the early 2010s (*Hunx: An evening of sweat,* n.d., *Hunx and his punkettes,* 2010, NardwuarServiette, 2011). Alongside the frequent rebirth of *Hunx*, the members, notably Bogart and Shaw, take up alternative art and music projects. In a 2016 PitchFork feature where he is dubbed the "New King of Camp," Bogart is quoted as saying:

> Honestly, I find so many fields—fashion, art, music—totally boring and restricting if you just stick to one of them and try so hard to fit into that thing. I decided early on that when I perform live, I would want to have a video playing, and was inspired by Le Tigre in that. (Moreland, 2016)

I suggest that this perspective ensures that the visual aspect becomes intrinsic to the musical experience, creating a performance that exceeds anything a track recording offers. Bogart's work continues to pay homage to countless queer and feminist artists and icons, including early riot grrrl figures such as Kathleen Hanna (with whom he has collaborated), Poly Styrene, Grace Jones, Yoko Ono, and the ever-controversial Valerie Solanas (*Wacky Wacko*, n.d.).

Additionally, Shaw's work is less overtly "queer" in terms of sexuality. However, it still incorporates a level of campiness attractive to the queer, freaky, or wacky, particularly if she is being compared to the likes of Divine by none other than John Waters. Her other band, *Shannon and the Clams*, incorporates a variety of sounds ranging

from surf rock and punk to 50's doo-wop (*Interview: Shannon*, 2014). Shannon plays bass and provides lead and backing vocals for the *Clams*. Her presence as the unapologetically stylish fat woman in a band of skinny white men is notable. The band also incorporates a kitschy and nostalgic aesthetic that can also be seen on her Instagram account; she often shows off her many tchotchkes, such as old troll dolls and aged Disney memorabilia, as well as her own painting and artwork that features many famous fat icons, such as Chris Farley and Etta James (Shaw, n.d.). As such, these two main figures of *Hunx* incorporate a variety of artistic perspectives beyond only "punk" or "queer punk" proper. Nonetheless, *Hunx's* music incorporates angst and anarchy akin to the punk traditions with a distinctively queer lens, and the members' overarching aesthetic choices consistently incorporate a revolting or perverse nature intrinsic to punk while embracing objects and materials from days past (Nault, 2018; Hebdige, 1979).

Hunx and His Punx's musical oeuvre includes many fast-paced songs with distorted power chords, typical of the punk genre. They also pay homage to pop music of the 50s and 60s with ballads of longing, evoking a past that becomes queered in the present iteration. Their lyrics are not bogged down by mysterious and poetic imagery. Rather they often elicit the clichés of a teenager with heartache: "I'm too young to be in love/so please oh please/Don't break my heart/I wanna go I wanna go back to the start" croons Bogart (Hunx, 2011). Embracing the simple lyrics suggests that anyone can be a lyricist or musician, staying true to the DIY nature of punk. As Nault details, punk encompasses a variety of aesthetic trends but primarily tends to "emphasize the crude, the imperfect and the disorderly—often produced via the re-working of everyday objects" (2018, p. 11). This DIY creation level is embraced beyond *Hunx's* musical tracks and is

represented through their fashion choices. Despite forming years after the beginnings of homo-core or the queercore revolution of punk music and subcultures, *Hunx* carries on anti-heteronormativity with unabashedly queer lyrics and videos, defying the straight white men of punk music. Additionally, like the subculture itself, the band incorporates a visual aesthetic that seems to be inextricable from the music. While the simplistic lyrics and messy guitar riffs honour the DIY and anti-mastery nature of punk and queercore, the band members' visual presentation, alongside other art they have created, offer an affective experience that is particularly apprehensible via live performance.

4.4 Live and In Person!

In my second chapter, I argued that the mediated experience of Fleischmann encountering and then detailing their experience of Félix González-Torres' piece *Untitled (A Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* via prose shows the possibilities of accessing various forms of art without having to witness them in person. However, in this chapter, I argue that the in-person aspect of the concert was pertinent to my affective experience. This is not to negate my previous claims but to suggest that in the context of performance art, *liveness* opens alternative opportunities for creating shared meaning when in proximity to other subjects. Affect theory attends to how bodies, subjectivities, and objects interact within a space and thus can create a *feeling* in the air, or as Ben Anderson suggests, an affective atmosphere (2009). I contend that the 2019 *Hunx* concert was an event that brought together subjects in a specific space and time because the show was live and held in person. As the affective feeling of a space is formed through the presence and absence of subjects and objects, it matters who is present and who is absent, as well as the contingent

subjectivities participants carry with them. Lisa Blackman describes subjectivity as "a concept which refers to those experiences and desires which although constituted through historical and discursive processes are experienced as emanating from a felt interiority" (2011, p. 183). This description aligns with Ahmed's queer phenomenology that suggests that we encounter objects in bodies shaped in and through our own histories and experiences (2006b). As I have posited through this thesis, particularly in chapter two, we encounter artworks with our own contingent histories. By virtue of being present in this time and space, bodies and objects come together to create unique and shifting feelings in the air. Anderson describes affective atmospheres as "a class of experience that occurs *before* and *alongside* the formation of subjectivity, *across* human and non-human materialities, and *in-between* subject/object distinctions" (2009, p. 78). The experience is concocted in and through the *relationships* between bodies, objects, and subjectivities. The liveness of the show is pertinent because it brings together subjectivities that relate and interact with one another and the objects that are present.

This point is emphasized by my reflection on these moments during the COVID-19 lockdowns that began the following year. Like many arts-based industries, theatre and live performance were affected by social-distancing measures and mandatory stay-at-home orders. However, artists pivoted by working with technology to create alternatives to in-person events, such as live-streaming and Zoom performances (Pietrzak-Franger et. al, 2023)[9]. Although this shift makes the art generally more accessible, the affective

[9] These pivots to online avenues were absolutely necessary during the height of the pandemic for the protection of one another and our vulnerable populations from COVID, and I think there is value in these alternatives. Nonetheless, the interaction with other bodies in a venue play a role in our experience of the event.

atmosphere that is created in and through bodies being in the same space is lost. Furthermore, apprehending performances and art in general is an embodied experience. Blackman writes that audiences are "'sensational subjects' engaging through their senses and feeling the performance in a visceral way" (2011, 195). Although many performance theorists argue that the ontology of the liveness of performance is challenged by our increasingly mediatized world (Auslander, 2023), affect theory exposes how there is indeed a difference between witnessing something via live video and being present for something within the same time and space. The bodies present affect the feeling and meaning that is created in the space, and our physical proximity to the event plays a role in how we perceive it.

The relevance of *liveness* was and is illuminated through the moment of the show when Bogart asked the crowd, "Who here is queer?" and we responded with enthusiastic and affirmative hollers. Through this question and response, the performer and audience are relating to each other. Additionally, the multitude of objects and subjects present created a time and space wherein it was *safe*, *celebrated*, and likely *expected* for us to respond with such excitement. This moment is representative of the way the aesthetics of the show worked to conjure the affects of queer joy and belonging. Through the aesthetic dimensions of the bodies and objects relating to one another, meaning was created that was specific to that event, even as the meaning and feeling can be dynamic and shifting (Anderson, 2009). Had it been a different time, space, and audience, such a question might have been charged with a much different meaning. Blackman discusses the way the queer unconscious can be communicated through performance in a way that is embodied and relational, that it is "always partial, plural, shared and co-emerges between subjects"

(2011, p. 196). The audience could declare queerness verbally because of the specific interrelatedness of those present and the subjectivities and relevant histories brought forth, emerging within the space because of the performance's in-person element. Throughout the next sections, I explore how certain objects and subjects contributed to the meaning-making of the space. I suggest that these include the DIY Punk aesthetics of the band and the audience, Bogart's queer gestures and confrontations, and the thickening of time that emerged from the reverence of bassist Shannon Shaw.

Live performance brings people together in space and time. The history of *Hunx and His Punx* as a queercore band which pays homage to queer and punk histories attracts a particular clientele. It is likely that the subjective histories of those present share queer experiences, although each one is necessarily unique. Blackman suggests that queer performance can be a way to enact or embody queer histories as a counter-memory to the traditional archive. "These memories" Blackman writes, "are embodied and felt, rather than clearly articulated and understood" (2011, p. 194). Verbally affirming queerness through question and answer via audience participation demonstrates an understanding of something shared that was present in that space and time. Jill Dolan describes *communitas* as:

> Moments in live theatre or a ritual in which audiences or participants feel themselves become part of the whole in an organic, nearly spiritual way; spectators' individuality becomes finely attuned to those around them, and a cohesive if fleeting feeling of belonging to the group bathes the audience. Attending performance, disparate people constitute these temporary publics. (2005, p. 11)

These temporary publics and their meanings are co-created affectively through the interrelatedness between participants, performers, and, as I will show, the aesthetic contours of the performance. I conceive of queer joy as being a complex feeling of laughter and silliness despite the constraints of a normative world, through the creation of a new world of our own. This can be achieved through a shift in our relationship to temporality which, in the case of the *Hunx* concert, was made possible through the specificities of the subjects and objects present at this performance.

Furthermore, the liveness of performance entails the irreproducibility of these specific moments. This congregation of particular entities will never reoccur. Performance theorist Peggy Phelan writes that live performance is always in the act of disappearing (1993). Muñoz writes that it has become "somewhat axiomatic within the field of performance studies that the act exists only during its actual duration" (2009, p. 71), thus motivating his reflection on what remains after the performance, the residuals of queer utopian illumination. This constant disappearance might suggest that the conditions producing the affects of queer joy and belonging are ephemeral themselves, resisting the rigidity of linear time.

4.5 DIY Punk Fashion and Clothing

The physical presence of attending a concert elicits a visual aesthetic or aspect – interacting and relating with the various subjects and objects present becomes a part of the whole performance experience. As Bogart makes a spectacle of stripping off his leather pants to reveal a leopard-print thong, he draws attention to the significance of the clothing worn by the band as objects to which the performers and audience relate. The

queer and punk aesthetics of the clothing of the *Punx* contributed to the affective atmosphere that was created during this live performance. During my visit at the Met, I was an onlooker invited into the world of camp and surrounded by haute couture garments. At the *Punx* show, I was an integral part of the aesthetic atmosphere in my second-hand clothes and beat-up sneakers. I argue that the leather and DIY garments worn by the performers work to forge a connection that has a queer temporal dimension. The garments are emblematic of queer, punk, and fetish histories, all of which are representative of anti-chrononormativity.

Despite each performer embodying an individual sense of style, all band members wore black leather garments. As a statement material, leather permeates a variety of fashion genres, but is notably entangled in punk, queer, and fetish subcultures. This points to the interesting and messy ways in which these movements overlap or converge. Leather is ubiquitous within punk aesthetics and its various iterations (Steele, 1996; Geczy & Karaminas, 2013). From its origins, punk borrowed from fetish wear to channel dissidence to standards of normativity and upset middle-class sensibilities (Steele, 1996; Geczy and Karaminas, 2013). Fetish wear incorporates various materials and textiles, but has a distinct subculture devoted to leather (Steele, 1996). Additionally, queer style theorists Geczy and Karaminas note that leather became prevalent in queer sartorial aesthetics in the 1950s through the creation of gay biker clubs, and Valerie Steele notes its frequency throughout various queer subcultures. In her account of fetish wear and its relationship to fashion, Steele cites Vito Russo, who claims that "leather 'gear' has become synonymous with queer" (1996, p. 157). Steele further argues that "leather functions as an international sign for sadomasochism [and] has come to signify

homosexuality" (1996, p. 157). Leather's association with these three overlapping communities suggests its aesthetic grounding in identities and subcultures which actively resist dominant ways of being in the world. Within the context of the concert, the performers' leather garments carry a history of disruption and rebellion. Jack Halberstam frames subcultures such as these as embodying a queer temporality by refusing notions of straight time which prioritize "bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity… and inheritance (2005, p. 6). Through the framework of queercore channelled by the *Punx*, wearing leather reminds us of deviating from a straight path. Indeed, it opens an alternative temporality that resists chrononormativity. Through these, we might begin to feel the ease associated with a queer belonging.

The visual spectacle differs from the exclusivity and luxury offered to visitors at the fashion exhibit at the Met, in that it provides creative possibilities regardless of class status. As the members wear leather covered in patches and paintings, the intervention of clothing through DIY and craft is encouraged. This DIY aesthetic is anti-capitalist in its messaging, following a history of reusing and reappropriating garments and materials prevalent in punk (Nault, 2018). Fashioning an individual look through such methods eschews the mass-reproduction of clothing favoured in a capitalist culture of fast-fashion and enormous textile waste. Hand-decorated pieces encourage re-working garments that might have been disposed otherwise. Simultaneously, valuing a DIY aesthetic, such as brandishing hand-painted, stitched, and patched garments, encourages spending more *time* on a single item than ought to be allotted in a chrononormative context. Unethical fashion production is practiced for the purpose of turning over as many items as possible. An original design, however, painstakingly done by oneself or a friend defies the forward

march of hyperproductivity. The audience, then, can savour taking ‘too much time’ to create a look that might become part of the aesthetic atmosphere of the concert. Not only is time not capitalized, but enormous wealth is not necessary. Creating these outfits and art does not hinge on one’s social status or monetary ability to buy one-of-a-kind pieces. Rather, you are making these pieces yourself with the materials you already have or those you can purchase second-hand. A high-end label is not required.

The performance’s incorporation of queer clothing and fashion seeped even beyond the duration of the musical set. After the band had finished playing, Bogart sold his own streetwear fashion pieces, “Wacky Wacko” goods, at a merch table. I was able to purchase wearable art to commemorate the concert, but it was also an opportunity to meet Bogart himself as he worked the table – still in his thong, sunglasses, and I noticed when I got up close, smudged red lipstick. I purchased a t-shirt with various scribbled band names and logos drawn by Bogart illustrated on both the front and back. The musicians featured are queer, and trans, and iconic women artists from as early as the 1960s to the 2000s: Tribe 8, The Ronettes, Pussy Riot, Beth Ditto, and Lesbians on Ecstasy, a small punk band from Montreal, Canada (stylized on the t-shirt as ‘Lesbians on XTC’). Not only does Bogart use this art to center the irreplaceable work of women and queer artists of various countercultural music scenes (although primarily punk) but his scribbled take and redrawing of the images purposefully lacks any-machine made perfection, thus evoking the means of production (Muñoz, 2009).

Beyond just the visual aesthetics of clothes, fashion theorist Chris Hesselbein argues for the importance of considering “dressed embodiment” to acknowledge that how we wear clothes and how we feel in clothes have social implications. He writes:

> Conventions of dress not only dictate which garments to wear and how, and ways of seeing and evaluating (dressed) bodies, but also tell us how to hold and comport ourselves in ways that conform to prevalent social norms of identity. (2021, p. 368)

Thus, what we wear has a direct relationship to the experiences of those who are present. We make clothing choices with our histories, experiences, and expected comfort level either consciously in the front of our minds, or subconsciously. Hesselbein argues that "Uncomfortable clothing or the feeling of being underdressed (or overexposed) can strongly affect how we move and interact socially" (2021, p. 371). This idea is pertinent when we consider the crowd present at the concert. When folks interested in this specific art form converge, a certain fashion aesthetic becomes acceptable. Therefore, a space that encourages the DIY ethos, queerness, and anti-normativity, can be a space of pleasure and comfort for folks to dress in ways that might not be acceptable in day-to-day living. Thus, my own clothing was not out of place at "Elsewhere," but integrated into the overall aesthetic of the space. Clothing can become a conduit to a feeling of a sense of belonging in a variety of ways then, through how it affects our relationship to one another alongside the values prioritized in the choice of clothing and the time taken to create one's look.

4.6 "Everyone's a Pussy, Fuck you Dude!:" Queer Gesture and Queer Confrontations

As I have been arguing, the audience and performers bring forth their subjectivity to the live experience and converge to create new meaning. This was emblematic during the performance of the *Hunx* song "Everyone's A Pussy (Fuck You Dude)." The thirty-

second track was sung by Bogart, the same lyrics repeated for its entirety: “Everyone’s a pussy (x3), fuck you dude!” Elmslie drums furiously, and Shannon’s bass grounds the distorted guitar riffs as she watches Bogart animate the lyrics. I am interpreting the meaning of this moment through my own partial lens, but this was not a meaning I created alone. Blackman also writes that “the performer is not simply expressing their own ‘symptoms’ but is connected to a shared history or counter-memory that exists inter-generationally and is felt inter-corporeally” (2011, p. 195). The art produced by the band is co-created with the audience members, as it works to form different webs of temporalities, it becomes a symptom of lived experiences. Bodies valuing queerness in this moment are still emerging from a queer history, even though our individual histories are unique. The music and the visual aesthetics work together to create a feeling or affective moment between the bodies present within the present bodies. As the participants sang along and laughed defiantly to the ‘in-your-face’ music and lyrics, I interpret this encounter to be a re-imagining of a past moment of queerphobia, presently being enacted on a different timeline with a different register.

As I came to this performance as a queer subject, I understand and have felt the monitoring of gender nonconformity on a visceral plane, all too frequently in our chrononormative context. Through his moving analysis of queer gesture through the performance of Kevin Aviance, Muñoz evokes the context of young queer boys who are policed into “butching up” their body language for fear of their queerness being found out (2009, p. 68). I can imagine Bogart walking in a queer manner, speaking with a feminine lilt, being the object of bullies, at any age, but perhaps more specifically in younger or adolescent years. While performing this song, he walks similarly across the stage but

instead, he is screaming in the foreground of a punk song reclaiming a queerphobic and misogynistic slur in the imagined face of his antagonists. While watching Bogart enact effeminate body language to a crowd of queers, we delight in this moment of subversion. Bogart's embodiment of this movement in a space where it is valued by participants works to reconstitute a relationship with our bodies and one another. As we create this new meaning, we might begin to feel at ease: the queerphobic slur becomes our own point of pride, we feel safety instead of fear. We realize that we can strut in a way that defies expectations of gender or sexuality.

Bogart's embodiment in these moments also has a temporal valence, in that when we strut and flit around, we do not walk in a straight line (Ahmed, 2006b). Thus, Bogart is also challenging bodily efficiency along with challenging gender norms. Again, this is a step that defies chrononormativity, but also mirrors Ahmed's image of deviating from the "straight" path (2006b). This reflects the campy body language of Oscar Wilde that I discussed as pertinent to my experience at the Met. To move excessively and with exaggeration is to deviate from the norm of straightness and onto another queer path. While the contexts are different, Bogart is enacting something akin to the gesture of Kevin Aviance, one that "contains an articulate message for all to read, in this case a message of fabulousness and fantastical becoming" (2009, p. 80). In this performance space, the movement is revalued as a celebration of gender defiance, reminding us that there are spaces and worlds that we create in which this subversion is embraced. The audience engages in screaming along and laughing *with* the performers in this new temporal realm.

To further reflect on the temporal nature of the content of this song, I want to bring forth the work of Heather Love. Heather Love who writes in her discussion of camp:

> Many negative or stereotypical representations from the past have been reappropriated through the mode of camp…images that have been reclaimed tend be those that reflect, in an excessive or ambivalent way, values that are acceptable or even desirable in a contemporary context. (2007, p. 170)

Bogart challenges the marginalization of effeminacy as he sings and dances across the stage wearing only a thong. His movements are campy in nature: swishy and playful. In the context of this concert, a venue full of queers embraces an effeminate man taking up space on stage. Through Bogart's exaggerated effeminate performance, effeminacy is being reclaimed and a new narrative occurs in the present. Acknowledging the present moment in opposition to reflecting on the past or looking to a future, also means to dally or linger. Not only do we connect to one another by being on the same temporal register, but we are recreating a moment for now, one that does not have an expectation for our future productivity. Dolan further writes that the performance-based "performative is not a metaphor, it's a doing" that "construct[s] a temporary public" (2005, p. 170). In this specific shared moment, we are working to co-create an alternative meaning where performing this effeminacy is real and valued.

In exploring the reality of anger and violence in these queer art forms, Nault suggests that moments such as *Hunx* performing this song exemplify "queer confrontations" in which the artists can create a counter-world of imagining an otherwise (2018). He writes that these moments of shock are a punk tactic, eliciting "punk's efforts to unnerve audiences to new thought and action via startling cultural artifacts" (2018, p.

111). The in-your-face element of this encounter is emphasized through the repetition of another song that evokes queer anger, as both songs repeat the same lyrics. “Don’t Call Me Fabulous” is twenty-six seconds of chaotic guitar fronted by Shaw’s raspy vocals. She sings, or perhaps more accurately, screams: “Don’t call me fabulous, fabulous, fabulous, oh my god!” repetitively. The repetition was emphasized throughout the concert as Bogart insisted the *Hunx* play “Don’t Call me Fabulous” three times in a row. These moments evoke a longstanding tradition within queer art that employs a counteraction to real (and real threats of) queerphobic violence, and the repetition emphasizes the force that these imagined moments could potentially hold (Nault, 2018). As the *Hunx* linger in this moment, playing “Fabulous” three consecutive times, it makes room for the consistent stalling of a chrononormative timeline by insisting that we are not finished. The refusal to move on mimics a purposeful sulking in which we indulge in an affective moment that Jack Pryor foregrounds in *Time Slips.* They write:

> Performance can function as a necessary site of repetition, recognition, and reparation—an embodied methodology for “claiming” experience. Each case study in this book offers a different example of an artist using performance as a tool to make history visible, trauma recognizable, and transformation possible, exposing the systems of violence that are so deeply embedded in our society so as to appear natural. (2017, p. 9).

In not letting this moment go, we “refuse to play by the nice rules” (Nault, 2018). The audience participated and screamed along to the lyrics, reaching some level of collective queer catharsis, basking in a powerful moment of release that we have created for ourselves.

The term "fabulous" offered by *Hunx* evokes a complex queer history that is shared with the audience during the time of performance. The irony of refuting fabulousness while Bogart struts around the stage quite fabulously is not lost on the crowd as they scream along. While superficially, the term might seem complimentary, it is possible that this is resistance to the objectification of queer people made by a homophobic public. For example, noticing queer fabulousness has often been fodder for discrimination and harassment for engaging in the perceived frivolity of personal aesthetics and fashion, particularly if the subject is transgressing gendered expectations (moore, 2018). Madison moore argues that when queer people partake in fabulousness, it is a conscious decision to no longer hide (2018, p. 8). By embracing fabulousness alongside refuting the term, *Hunx* foregrounds an existing tension. This feels like an assertive move: Bogart is fabulous on his own terms, in this time and space, with a crowd of queers revelling in his art. While discussing "Bash Back" movements through the work of Lauren Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman, Nault suggests that this imagined queer violence through queercore emphasizes similar elements (2018). "'Bash Back,'" Nault writes, "was part of a 1990s 'new gay power tactic,' dramatizing society's failure to protect its vulnerable queer citizens while also laboring to undo common stereotypes of queers, and in particular gay men, as weak, passive and frivolous" (2018, p. 110). As Shaw screams the lyrics, and as Bogart dances on stage, there is anger, there is no passivity, *and* the fabulousness is plain to see. The audience joins in on shared knowledge, an inside joke. We might be laughing, but in this moment, it is collective. Like our screams and cackles during "Everyone's a Pussy," we laugh *with* the fabulous

Bogart, rather than *at* him. We revel in this moment together, feeling the reprieve in the joyous and absurd not regularly afforded to us through chrononormativity.

4.7 "Little Bo-Peep and Divine on Steroids:" Fat Time and the Incomparable Shannon Shaw

In this section, I explore how the presence of Shannon Shaw enriched the show's anti-chrononormative experience. Waters describes Shaw as "little Bo-Peep and Divine on steroids," evoking a subversive presence of larger-than-life femininity. Her incredible talent as a vocalist and bassist, alongside her individual fashion and aesthetic sense, made her a commanding figure that evening at "Elsewhere" and throughout her many other artistic endeavours. I suggest that intrinsic to this powerful presence is her fat embodiment. Despite queercore's attempts to destabilize normative expectations of music and aesthetics, it continues to promote a history of valuing thinness and whiteness (Nault, 2018). Shaw is a subject whose stage presence challenges the anti-fat bias of not only mainstream music representation, but the ways in which these subcultures can still perpetuate normative body ideals. As an audience-participant at this show, I recall feeling held in the particularities of my 'non-ideal' body in that moment. My enjoyment was not precluded by the self-consciousness many of us feel by failing to meet impossible body standards. Rather, this failure was welcomed.

I am cautious about discussing Shaw's body in a way that objectifies her. "Fat" is not a word that I have seen Shaw openly use for her embodiment. Because of the connotation of the term, it is tricky applying this terminology to someone who does not publicly talk about her relationship with her body. However, I use the lens of fat studies

to show why it is crucial to talk about fat outside of our fatphobic Western constructions. Fat studies theorists have been working toward valuing fat subjectivities outside of a narrative that deems fat bodies as requiring change to become thinner. It is a growing discipline with a diverse history that works alongside de-pathologizing and de-medicalizing the fat body in the wake of the socialized norm of the harmful panic of the "obesity epidemic" alongside incorporating narratives, perspectives and subjectivities provided by actual fat voices, scholars and activists (Cooper 2009). Queer fat theorists have argued that valuing fatness is inherently queer in how it resists a dominant narrative of aspirational thinness (Wykes, 2014). Research has explored the implications of queer fat time that challenge how fatness is construed, shamed, and accepted alongside a linear, capitalist, and heterosexual timeline (Mitchell, 2018; Hernandez, 2020; McFarland et al., 2018). Thus, I take the term "fat" to be a critical aesthetic descriptor that can offer us insight into the affects of queer joy and belonging.

As we have considered Bogart's effeminate presence on the stage, it is also important to acknowledge that he is also thin, white, able-bodied, and muscular. There is indeed a history of body shame that exists within predominantly gay male communities (Wood, 2004). The men we often see as representatives of gayness uphold a particular phenotype – that of Bogart's. Moreover, the band's whiteness does not challenge the whiteness consistently foregrounded in punk subcultures. Yet Shaw's presence, alongside the utter reverence shown toward Shaw by Bogart and the audience, carried an affective importance that elevated my experience. By including a fat performer, something is tangibly felt by those whose bodies do not fit into conventional models of acceptability. Shaw's hold on the audience is accomplished without the same delightful flamboyance as

her co-performer. Yet watching her take a proverbial backseat to the antics that Bogart provides does not diminish her demanding presence on stage.

Fat theorists have acknowledged the importance of including fat people in representation beyond tokenizing and of course beyond body-shaming. While working on a fat archive of the quotidian activities of fat people, Lauren Guerrieri notes that:

> By making visible alternative and positive representations of fatness, the lived experience of fat is shown to be complex, pleasurable, fulfilled and inclusive… By showing that fat people too have the same life goals, experiences, successes, and satisfactions, it makes it harder for people to imagine otherwise." (p. 204).

While Guerrieri is focusing on the importance of acknowledging everyday fat lives, the message rings true for representations beyond our daily lives, such as that of a punk show. Watching a fat person command respect and attention through her prowess as a musician provides an alternative representation to what continues to be offered in mainstream media. In this "Elsewhere" world that the audience and the performers are co-creating, a fat person's presence and achievements are revered. I suggest that this provides an added valence to the queer time within which we unbind from straight narratives; Shaw lets us comfortably slip into a fat time together.

Theorist Yessica Garcia Hernandez discusses the participation of fat dancers in their burlesque community and how this provides an alternative to what she calls "thin time" (2020), another normative aspect of mainstream temporality. Hernandez argues that the incorporation of fat bodies in these performances denies traditional "thin times" that prescribe "before and after" narratives which value weight-loss as the ultimate goal (2020). In "thin time," fat folks' bodies are only valuable in a future in which they are

thinner, not in their current existing fat bodies. Hernandez incorporates “thin time” into what has been our understanding of chrononormativity thus far: “thin time, as an additional descriptor of hegemonic normative time, is important because fat women are constantly trained to live in the future: their present body is viewed as too fat, outside the normal, not deserving of the present” (2020, p. 109). Without being privy to Shaw’s relationship to her body (nor should we feel like we must), we have a subject in a body that is not generally recognized as valuable being revered by the cheering crowds – exuding extra loud whoops and hollers when Bogart announces her presence on stage. Wearing leather and pins, mesh and voluminous platinum blonde hair, Shaw makes no attempt to hide or shrink. Despite her deference to Bogart as the performance leader, her aesthetic does not become an afterthought or serve as an attempt to diminish her features into a normative mould. When we cheer for Shaw and all that she is in those moments, we make room for the celebration of fat bodies *as they are.*

Nault discusses the liberatory potential of “queercore bodies” that challenge the hegemonic representations of “young, thin, white, conventionally handsome gay men” (2018, p. 147). He explores the revolutionary punk performer Beth Ditto as being an example of what he calls “embodied corpulence,” wherein the subject embraces the now-ness of her body, fleshy and fat, without medicalizing or naming it in relation to the (problematic) “problem of obesity” (p. 2018, p. 151). Nault’s analysis of Ditto’s art and presence in magazines and media, unabashedly taking up space usually reserved for thin and airbrushed rockstars and models, fractures the conventionally accepted mainstream representations of fat women in particular, similar to the theoretical fat-time offered by Hernandez: “Ditto’s acceptance of her here-and-now body has produced a rupture in a

representational regime that continually portrays fat women as either grossly unhappy or happily on their way to becoming thin" (2018, p. 130). Nault also marks a way for the existence of queercore bodies to provide alternatives to the body-shame we might see in more homonormative queer communities. In discussion with both Hernandez and Nault, it is interesting to note that the valuation of bodies in their present form, without an attachment to a "thin" future, coalesces with a trans affect that also resists a "before and after" narrative of transitioning, but rather sees an aesthetic value in the "betweenness" of these phases, wherein trans bodies might not be legible within cisnormative societies (Crawford, 2013). Fat bodies, in these moments of their "embodied corpulence" and resistance to fading into the background, challenge normative legibility through their undeniable lack of attachment to a future temporal moment. This becomes valuable to a spectator, particularly a fat spectator, in a way that opens up time for belonging.

While I in no way wish to impose a narrative upon Shaw's relationship to her body, I do think that her presence as a remarkable fat musician is irrefutable, enriching the queer time that was present in the concert venue on that night. I acknowledge that I am a smaller-fat person who has experienced a lot of thin privilege. But this does not necessarily matter, even if my own relationship to my body has not been a place of strife, the inclusion of fat bodies in these spaces is integral to an anti-capitalist queer fat time. Shaw's place in *Hunx and His Punx* is part of a queer creativity that works beyond the restraints of body shaming. While it may be imperfect, as this band is white and not visibly disabled, what it does show is how queers and non-normative subjects are forging important moments that continue to challenge the constraints of our dominant structures.

4.8 Conclusion: Queercore Joy and Belonging

As I have shown, the many aesthetic elements of the concert untether us from the chrononormative reality we face in our day-to-day lives in a way that allows us to dwell in the absurd. As we scream along with Bogart and admire Shaw, the audience and performers create new meanings together, wherein leather and a leopard-print thong are part of a twisted dress-code and fat subjectivities are revered. We are a *communitas* in love with our own queerness, refusing to align with normative conceptions of happiness and abide by a chrononormative valuation of time. These moments, as I have been suggesting throughout this thesis, do not come without the knowledge of our current material world: capitalist heteronormativity has shaped our histories and awaits us when we resurface. But despite these bleak conditions, queer artists have been creating these worlds for us anyway, making time for unencumbered laughter where we can decompress for an evening. In these moments, a queer sense of belonging allows us to unbind from the chrononormativity that constrains our embodiment; there might even be some physical relief as we feel that we do not have to force our gestures or bodies into gender expectations. In my thrifted clothes, I might feel the belly I have been unconsciously holding in suddenly feel at ease. These moments constitute a reprieve; a slow time wherein we might share in catharsis and laughter. Laughing together because through gender-policing, through classist divides, through queerphobia and fatphobia, we have been hurt. Now we laugh to feel this pain momentarily subside.

I began writing this chapter shortly after my experience of the show in 2019, yet evidently my analysis has been drawn out over an extended timeline. Although the moments I address are specific to this performance, my intent has been to highlight the

unique capacity of queer art, and particularly of live queercore performance, to challenge the way time is valued through our dominant structures. Although the moment has long past, my dallying in the details can show that despite its ephemerality, this aesthetic world is a vast space to which I often return. By similarly attending to the work of T Fleischmann, alongside the curation of Camp: Notes on Fashion and the underground joy felt alongside *Hunx and His Punx*, I hope to emphasize the ways in which queer artists play with aesthetics to create temporal spaces that resist chrononormativity, which includes returning to these moments and allowing them to continue to affect us. Each of these case studies has foregrounded the ways art can be affectively experienced with the possibility that this can be conducive to belonging through a moment of reprieve from a heteronormative world. In embracing these moments, we might also make way for momentary silliness, absurdity, and laughter, without the added responsibility of political transformation. While imagining an 'otherwise' where this is possible can be a political act, this does not necessarily have to be its intended purpose. Rather, moments can be inherently valuable. And often, we create them ourselves.

Although I have been able to explore this concert through a very privileged journey to the queer mecca of NYC, I suggest that queer joy and belonging are not only available to us in these large cities with widely known queer histories. Indeed, I show throughout my next chapter how queer artists are creating similar moments in places that are not necessarily tied to metropolitan areas.

Chapter 5

5 "I Think I'm Due for a Shitty Tattoo:" Queer Stick-and-Poke Tattoos as Resisting Chrononormativity

> This is my Tribe 8 star. So, this was given to me by Stacie Quijas…at Leslie Mah's apartment, and everybody almost from Tribe 8 was there. It was one of the coolest moments of my life, I was literally, like, laying on a blanket getting a tattoo with India ink and needles from the most beautiful punk girl I had ever seen in my life, and I was such a big fan of their band.
>
> - Kathleen Hanna, *Queercore: How to Punk a Revolution* (Leyser, 2017)

In this final chapter, I piece together more moments of potential queer connection, belonging, and joy through an artistic method that has evaded documentation: the queer stick-and-poke[10] tattoo. This practice and its accompanying aesthetics have been lurking in the corners of queer subcultures for an indeterminable amount of time. In apartments shared by too many roommates, in teenage bedrooms, in the scummy bathrooms of parties, and now in professional tattoo shops, queers have been giving each other hand-poked, or stick-and-poke, tattoos. These manual tattoos are acquired by piercing the skin with a needle dipped in ink and, unlike the conventional North American twenty-first-century tattoo, are completed without the aid of an electrical machine. I argue, similarly to the art explored in previous chapters, that this manual art form is demonstrative of a multitude of queer aesthetics which can phenomenologically shift our body/ies' relationship(s) to time. When considered through the intersection of queer temporality, queer phenomenology, and affect theory, I show how stick-and-poke tattoos underscore the moments of joy that counter-cultural queers create through art that does not meet

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[10] Throughout this chapter I refer to the practice as "stick-and-poke" or "hand-poke" interchangeably

conventional standards of acceptability, for example, art we are not likely to see in institutions like a museum. By illuminating the persistent creativity and playfulness demonstrated by queer stick-and-poke recipients and practitioners, I am advocating for the integral role familiar art can play in cultivating quotidian queer joy and belonging. Worlds away from the halls of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, queers are still having moments of joy and belonging in the time-spaces they have created on their own. To this end, I argue that the aesthetics of the queer stick-and-poke tattoo, a manual tattoo acquired and/or received by a queer person, is an example of how queers defy the temporal rhythm of capitalist-cis-heteronormativity and unbind in a moment of queer joy and belonging that stretches out into the past and future.

My exploration of the stick-and-poke tattoo begins with a brief and limited history of the practice of tattooing that grounds the current North American landscape and industry. This history is necessarily truncated in scope, as there is evidence of tattooing on human bodies that dates to as early as 3300 BCE (Jones, 2000, p. 2). However, the recent history of tattoo methods and the growth of the industry is pertinent for discussing the stick-and-poke done by queers, particularly as my queer phenomenological approach centers on how bodies are oriented toward certain objects and not others (Ahmed, 2006b). There is a continued and growing uptake of tattooing in various cultures and subcultures, including what might be considered more mainstream or normative cultures. Therefore, I contend that the hand-poke method resists the commodification of tattooing and defies what Mary Kosut has coined as the contemporary “artification” of the practice of tattooing (2014). I suggest that this current state of the larger industry surrounding the art form has become integrated into chrononormative expectations, which marginalizes

counter-cultural queers. I further draw on an article written by Megan Sharp and Shoshana Rosenberg, who suggest queer punx engage with tattoos as a means of embodying a Muñozian "utopian futurity" (2018), whereby queers enact the possibility of an alternative futurity through their tattooed bodies. This paper helps provide some of the groundwork to expose the possibilities of the art form for queers in punk spaces, but there is no mention of the hand-poke method, specifically. Therefore, I follow this contextualization by providing vignettes of stick-and-poke examples as the art peeks through small cracks of queer storytelling while remaining a relatively concealed practice. I trace this art and its process through autoethnographic retellings of my own hand-poke experiences, via excerpts and brief moments in T Fleischmann's essay, through small clues in a recently published book entitled *Queer Tattoo* that explores the broader practice of queer tattooing compiled by queer tattoo artists (Rudolph et al., 2022), and through a 2019 song entitled "Stick N Poke" by queer musician, Palehound.

As in previous chapters, I am approaching this topic through a particular lens of temporality, embodiment, and affect theory to expose the queer phenomenon of the stick-and-poke tattoo. As I have been searching and uncovering various art forms, I am interested in how art can shift our relationship to temporality because, within our North American capitalist context, we are consistently bound by the constraints of chrononormativity. This normative temporal bind, as I argue alongside Elizabeth Freeman, is enacted upon our bodily disposition (Freeman, 2010), and I suggest that queer bodies uniquely feel this via a concept I have named queer embodied discordance. Concurrently, as outlined in my introduction, perceiving and engaging with art means using our senses and allowing our bodies to be affected (Fielding, 2021). Thus, my

approach highlights the connection between how we both encounter art and *feel* time in and through our embodiment. By foregrounding these vignettes of stick-and-poke tattooing through this lens, I explore elements of the practice that encapsulate queer aesthetic forms that offer us moments of potential queer belonging and queer joy.

I divide the queer aesthetic forms of the stick-and-poke tattoo discussed throughout this chapter into two overarching categories: *Embodying Art* and *Bad Art*. Accounting for the embodiment of the medium reveals how tattoos become incorporated into our bodies and subsequently move with us through the world. I explore the significance of the inextricable link between the tattoo recipient, their continued shifting embodiment, and the process of the art form. I also show how the queer stick-and-poke holds the potential for enacting playfulness and creativity. Following this, I investigate how hand-poked tattoos can exemplify amateur art, or what I lovingly refer to as "bad art," in which we value and prioritize the imperfect tattoo that resists what has become an "artified" medium (Kosut, 2014). Throughout the chapter, I argue that this collection of various but specific aesthetic forms that are unique to the queer hand-poked tattoo can imagine and create a world with a different temporality. I believe that this art form tells us the story of how queers have always been finding ways of being in the world beyond dominant structures that work to marginalize divergent bodies and identities systemically. Importantly, I show that queers behold joy, community, and belonging through their own playfulness and creativity, independent from the institutional validation of what 'counts' as art.

5.1 Contextualizing the Practice of Stick-and-Poke

While it is not possible to trace the exact origins of the queer stick-and-poke tattoo, I recognize that the practice comes from a vast and nebulous art form: tattooing is incredibly diverse and seen throughout various cultures worldwide (DeMello, 2000; Caplan, 2000; Rubin, 1988). Looking at the history of tattooing involves exploring visual aesthetics and how particular cultures in historical periods relate to and make meaning through this broader art form (Fenske, 2007; DeMello, 2000). Across cultures, tattoos have had spiritual significance and have been used to mark religious beliefs (Fedorak, 2009); they have been used to celebrate memories or commemorate loved ones (Davidson, 2017; Steadman et al., 2019); they have been used to indicate group membership, social status, or individuality (DeMello, 2000; Weiler & Jacobsen, 2021). For much of contemporary North American culture, the creation and acquisition of tattoos are rationalized through narratives; they tell a story, not only aesthetically, but tattoo collectors also tell stories about their tattoos (DeMello, 2000). Artists and theorists alike have commented that the medium is as diverse as any other, with as much variation and potential as demonstrated by painting or sculpture (Rubin, 1988). I begin by exploring my current tattooed-location and tug on some relevant threads that have contributed to these circumstances.

I grew up as a millennial in North America, where the commodification of tattoos and their consistent presence in pop culture shaped my relationship with the art form (Kosut, 2006; Force, 2022; Weiler & Jacobsen). While they have existed ubiquitously throughout media in my lifetime, I tend to associate tattoos with marginalized groups and connotations of being an outsider. The tattoo's marginal status seems counterintuitive,

given that they are all over the bodies of our most lionized and mainstream celebrities, including actors, musicians, and "influencers" (Burns, 2019; Kosut, 2014). Nevertheless, it is not uncommon to suggest that tattoos evoke deviancy, which is a recurring theme throughout my chapter. However, because of the tattoo's continued popularity and through tools like social media, I suggest that there is a class stratification within the practice of tattooing; or, to approach it temporally, the current mainstream tattoo landscape operates on a fast-paced, hyperproductive (and hyper-consumptive) chrononormative timeline that excludes many queer folks who live with precarity. Although abundant, tattoos are not always accessible to folks of lower incomes, and what is considered a good enough tattoo keeps advancing quickly. Particular parameters thus limit the mainstream and more 'acceptable' tattoo. It is pertinent to explore how the art form has established itself into this rhythm while maintaining its marginal, deviant, or stigmatized connotations to some degree.

Margo DeMello's text *Bodies of Inscription* traces the history of tattoos from a North American and Western perspective, documenting significant moments that have shaped and shifted the cultural reception of and engagement with tattoos (2000).[11] A critical historical moment for my discussion includes the invention of the tattoo machine during the 1890s. Before this, tattoos were acquired with a needle and ink manually (perhaps a similar process to my definition of the practice of stick-and-poke), making the process longer and thus more costly, subsequently giving them artistic appeal to people of

[11] DeMello acknowledges that tattooing is intertwined with a history of colonization. Unfortunately, it is not possible to explore this topic with the appropriate rigor and care that is warranted within the confines of this project. However, I will note that there are many Indigenous artists who are using and revitalizing traditional tattooing methods to honour and continue the practice's important place in Indigenous knowledges (Alvarez, 2019).

higher-class status. The mechanization of tattooing made the art form more accessible to working-class patrons. Thus, a demographic shift occurred, cementing an association of the tattoo with the working class for a large part of the 20th century, often associated with working-class men, until a "Tattoo Renaissance" began in the 1960s and 1970s.

During the Tattoo Renaissance, the tattoo was reappropriated from its status and association with the working class, prisoners, bikers, and gang members to becoming embraced by the middle class (Rubin, 1988; DeMello, 2000; Force, 2022). Many cultural and political factors contributed to this shift; for example, there was an increase in licensing, certification and professionalism in the industry, minimizing the risk of acquiring tattoos (Force, 2020). DeMello and Rubin write that the Tattoo Renaissance can partly be attributed to tremendous political upheaval seen via the Black liberation movement, anti-war protests, the Stonewall riots, and increased feminist activism (DeMello, 2000; Rubin, 1988). Such counter-cultural change meant that many people beyond the working-class populations associated with tattooing soon became interested in a tattoo to express their differences or defiance of the status quo. New-age hippie movements in the West were engaging with arts and cultures from beyond the West, which legitimized the art form that was typically considered 'primitive.' Meanwhile, white tattooists were expanding the North American tattoo by taking imagery and style from Eastern countries. Artists would appropriate artistic styles from the East, coalescing with the imagery of a new-age movement (DeMello, 2000). DeMello suggests this shift in the typical imagery, which included embracing tattoo artwork that may contain more layers of significance for the tattooee, played a crucial role in allowing the continued longevity and acceptance of middle-class tattoos beyond what she calls the "immediate

counter-cultural impulse" (DeMello, 2000, p. 75). Additionally, increased professionalism contributed to the longevity of tattoo popularity (DeMello, 2000). Though its popularity has ebbed and flowed throughout demographics, tattooing appears constant throughout North America.

Despite becoming relatively commonplace, the tattoo is neither universally beloved nor necessarily accepted. Rather, certain types of tattoos hold higher cultural status, even amongst those who have and appreciate the art form. DeMello argues that the 1980s and 1990s demonstrate a stratification between "high-brow" and "low-brow" tattooing enforced by tattoo media and participants in the broader community of tattoo collection. High-brow tattooing focused on "more sophisticated, artistic, and meaningful aspects and…the increasing professionalism of a new generation of young, mostly middle-class tattoo artists. At the same time, those spokespeople tried to distance modern tattooing from its working-class history" (DeMello, 2000, p. 97). This stratification, which values artistic prowess and meaningful connection to the artwork and imagery, carries into the more contemporary tattoo landscape. However, it also reinforces an association between the lesser tattoo and its historical connection to the working class. I suggest that acceptable tattoos are mainstream tattoos that might be considered more "high-brow," whereas tattoos seen as less sophisticated, such as the queer stick-and-poke, do adhere to high-brow expectations.

From an early twenty-first century perspective, Mary Kosut writes that the tattoo has become commodified, not only as an art form one can purchase and consume, but as a tool for marketing and selling other products (2006). For middle-class consumers, this means the tattoo becomes sellable in a way that detaches it from its connection to wearers

with deviant, marginal, or underprivileged backgrounds. Kosut explores how the media frames the art form and notes that a new connotation has developed:

> [Tattoos] are no longer the emblems of the economically and socially excluded: punks, gang members, and bad kids from economically ravaged neighborhoods. This perceived cultural evolution functions to sanction the practice of tattooing, allowing the possibility for tattoos to be acceptable to the mainstream, if not into respectability. The new tattooees are not exotic or deviant others—they are everyday people with aesthetic sensibility. (2006, p. 1044)

The cultural acceptance of tattoos in North America is thus dependent upon socioeconomic status and several other identity markers, such as age, ability, race, and gender. Therefore, it is not that tattoos writ large are acceptable, but that particular tattoos on certain people are deemed appropriate for the larger middle-class uptake of the art form. A tattoo's acceptability and potential respectability are also shaped by whether or not the tattoo reaches an artistic standard.

Kosut also writes that the tattoo's proximity to the art world has legitimized the form in broader mainstream society (2014). She argues that during the turn of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, the tattoo went through a process that she calls "artification" stemming from the cultural shift of the tattoo during its renaissance and the ongoing capitalism of the following decades. What was previously considered folk art or craft practiced through informal training is now considered art in a more traditional and institutional sense. Exhibitions and art galleries have displayed the art form, validating the tattoo as worthy of institutional consideration. Additionally, artists are turning toward tattooing as a steady source of income. Kosut argues that it is now more common to see

professionally trained “artists” in this field, and as such, there is a trend toward applying “formal rules or elements of visual art, like line, shape, space, value (light and dark), color and texture” (2014, p. 152). Whereas twentieth-century artists honed their craft through practice, “they were typically not acquainted with art genres and practices” (Kosut, 2014, p. 154). Because of this shift, tattoos are now more commonly seen in a wider array of artistic styles often considered “art” by “institutional experts.” For example, now portraits can look hyper-realistic rather than “crude in technique and/or rudimentary in design” (Kosut, 2014, p. 145). Even Kosut distinguishes between a “tattoo” and “tattoo art,” comparing the differences between an everyday photograph and an intentionally artistic photograph. This trend might also contribute to the art form’s increasing price tag. I suggest that the tattoo’s expanding connection to the hyper-capitalist art world contributes to the schism through which *only some* tattoos are deemed acceptable or worthy of consideration. Acceptable tattoos must demonstrate advanced artistic skill. The identity of the person wearing the tattoo(s) and their location and social circumstances also contribute to its acceptability. The tattoo is always inscribed upon a body, so these factors are subject to constant change (Larsen et al., 2017; Roux & Bell, 2018).

As I am writing from the context of twenty-first-century tattooing, I must acknowledge the multitude of ways recent technological advancements have affected the industry. William Force explores how social media, particularly Instagram, has shifted the tattooing industry as artists use the platform as a tool to expand their practice (2020). There is greater access to other artists’ work and collections of various styles documented throughout the site. Users can now view tattoo art from around the world via their phone,

opening opportunities for inspiration and artistic cultural exchange. Force argues, however, that the virtual scene "engages tattooing's deviant past alongside its increased acceptability as an art form" (2020, p. 15). He suggests that some artists do this by engaging in "ignorant style" and "patchwork tattooing." Ignorant style tattoos embrace crude imagery and thin lines associated with "lower class styles," such as prison tattoos, or Chicano tattooing.[12] Patchwork tattooing has been considered a class-status marker in the industry as it is made up of smaller, cheaper tattoos, rather than larger, more costly and thoroughly planned tattoos. According to Force, these styles are now performed through increased technology that allows for skillful application (2020, p. 7). While the art expands into something more socially acceptable, there is still a way to aesthetically recall the deviancy that was historically associated with the tattoo. Even so, modern expectations around the tattoo require a certain level of artistic prowess, gatekeeping those outside these constructed parameters. Inevitably, social media platforms become the arbiters of whose work is most important. Users of Instagram are still subject to the ways the platform highlights some artists' works and quite literally hides others, reflecting human biases (Taylor, 2014)

Rosenberg and Sharp explore queer tattoos in punk spaces and how they contribute to a queer subversion of punk scenes in Melbourne and Newcastle, Australia (2018). As I have outlined in chapter four, the authors note that the larger category of *punk* is embroiled with heteronormativity, misogyny, transphobia, and racism (2018, p.

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[12] I want to flag that the association of Chicano tattooing as a "lower class style" is not interrogated throughout this article. I posit that this may be echoes of the past colonial association with tattooing as a 'primitive' practice. While an important conversation, this is beyond the purview of this chapter, perhaps warranting future research.

160). Queer punx enact methods of resistance through movements like *Queercore,* as seen through *Hunx and His Punx* and, as Rosenberg and Sharp argue, through the presence of queer tattoos. By engaging with queer punx via semi-structured interviews alongside the authors' autoethnographic experiences of these punk communities, Rosenberg and Sharp show how queer tattoos shape the affective atmosphere of the punk scene by offering potential illuminations of queer futurity. I explore affective atmospheres through my attention to the various aesthetics at the *Hunx* concert. These theorists also borrow the concept from Ben Anderson, which refers to the *feeling* of a space shaped by its many contours, "wherein a material space, object, or embodied interaction both manufactures and is enhanced by a kind of 'air' (atmosphere)" (Sharp & Rosenberg, 2018, p. 162). Therefore, the many bodies, objects, and subjects of a space play a role in shaping this affective feeling; this includes the queer bodies that exist within a space and how they share or hide their queer tattoos. This concept reflects my position in chapter four, which argues for the significance of bodies being in space together at a live concert. Much like the punk garments of *Hunx and His Punx*, tattoos also shape the affective feeling in an environment.

Rosenberg and Sharp suggest that queer bodies become "ephemeral archives" through the process of tattooing, wherein the slipperiness of queerness and its futurity becomes embodied by the participants. The tattoo process includes not merely getting the tattoo but also planning it and documenting the "finished" tattoo, which they explore via Instagram. While acknowledging that our bodies are in a process of constant decay and the tattoo is present insofar as the person with that tattoo is alive, the subsequent documentation on a social media site contributes to an archive of queerness that works

beyond typical archival methods (Rosenberg and Sharp, 2018). Moreover, the process of tattooing is also a pathway to communicate queerness to other queer people in and through the punk community, not only at punk events or shows but also through social media. They follow the hashtag #QTTR (a hashtag shorthand to denote that the tattoo posted is by a queer tattooer) and discover that many queer punx use this hashtag. Its usage has contributed to a growing online tattoo and queer punk community, also exemplified through *Queer Tattoo* (Rudolph et al., 2022). Ultimately, tattoos and the tattoo process can reconstruct the affective atmosphere of punk communities, online and in person, to make space for queer punx.

I aim to further their thesis that queer tattooed bodies in punk spaces (online or in person) can embody futurity by suggesting that this can be conducive to queer belonging and queer joy. However, I postulate that my aesthetic and temporal discussion of stick-and-poke tattoos can enrich this position by encouraging artistic and aesthetic practice outside of mainstream validation or the continued "artification" of the tattoo, alongside highlighting the value of the acquisition process. While tattoos have the capacity to offer connection, I look toward the art and aesthetics of the amateur DIY stick-and-poke tattoo that do not meet the standards that have been increasingly raised by the growing technology of the tattoo industry and landscape. By doing this, I intend to revalue the art of the not-good-enough and the works-in-progress that remain works-in-progress. I do not intend to raise the amateur stick-and-poke to a level of mainstream acceptability. Rather, I show how joy and belonging can be held throughout the creative process regardless of skill.

5.2 Stick-and-Poke Vignettes

As I turn toward the stick-and-poke tattoo, I am turning away from what I consider conventional tattoos in our current North American context. As described in the introduction, a stick-and-poke tattoo is completed without a tattoo machine, using only a needle and ink. In this chapter, I am referring to *amateur* stick-and-poke tattoos created or received by a queer person who does not necessarily use the practice to earn an income. Because I am tracing something practiced without licensing, I am looking at an art form that has evaded substantial documentation. While tattooists in Canada do not need a license to practice, I am looking even more deeply at the stick-and-poke moments that occur outside of a professional shop, to the moments hidden in more private spaces, say a bedroom or the living room of a student apartment. Additionally, the practice itself is risky and still contains connotations of deviance (McGuire and Chrisler, 2016), giving practitioners reason for keeping the process out of view. Discussing stick-and-poke feels akin to exposing a queer secret and attempting to concretize an ephemeral practice that purposely hides in the margins. This possibility instills within me some discomfort. Yet, I also feel confident in how queer art continues to resist any attempt at mainstreaming aesthetics, mainly as I will show it is an art form that is always in process, much like "camp" fluctuates in meaning dependent upon the dominant artistic landscape and culture of the time (Cleto, 1999). Furthermore, my exploration of the hand-poke tattoo highlights the persistence of art within marginalized groups to show the joy and belonging created in the process. Unlike artistic objects curated through an institution like the Met that is not accessible to everyone, this hidden practice shows how we have joy and playfulness

through art in our own time with whatever we *can* access. Higher-end tattoos are costly, yet, this does not limit some queers from creatively participating in the art of tattooing.

Because of the undocumented nature of the hand-poked tattoo, I am practicing a method of "reading into" an art form as per queer relational aesthetics (Getsy & Doyle, 2014). That is, I bring forth some examples that could be interpreted otherwise, yet I invoke a queerness as I am encountering them from my own situated embodiment. Due to my connection to the art form, I have sought other examples to trace a thread of meaning. These examples are found through objects I have personally pursued according to my aesthetic tastes in music and literature, shaped by my experiences and social location. I introduce the queer stick-and-poke experience by detailing the circumstances of my encounters through the first-person narrative. In a nod to "autotheory," I creatively frame my motivation to explore this art form (Fleischmann, 2013; Wiegman, 2020). I acknowledge that this is a memory, so there is room for reinterpretation. However, throughout this chapter, I uncover how the affect of this moment still lingers within the tattoo. Next, I look toward other queer artists who reference the stick-and-poke method in some of their work, even if subtly. I briefly describe their connections to the art form while including some personal reflections on my tattoo experiences. The first reference is a song by US-based indie artist Palehound, entitled "Stick N Poke" (2019). I also unpack moments found throughout T Fleischmann's *Time is the Thing a Body Moves Through*, wherein they briefly mention their tattoos and their subsequent effect on their embodiment and connection with others (2019). Finally, I pull from two highlights of queer tattoo artists compiled in a 2022 publication, *Queer Tattoo*, that demonstrate the amateur practice (Rudolph et al., 2022). These seemingly disparate sources knit together

a probable story: queers have been using this hand-poke method to tattoo each other, creating moments for joy and belonging on their *own time*.

5.2.1 Cruel Optimism

The first stick-and-poke tattoo I ever received was done by a fellow graduate student in the summer following the first year of my doctoral program in 2018. On a gloomy Sunday after a stop at a local punk artist market, my peer poked an inked sterile needle into the back of my upper thigh many times to shakily spell out CRUEL OPTIMISM. Having read this titular chapter from the late Lauren Berlant in our *Feminist Theories* class, members of my graduate cohort joked that we would get this tattoo as a collective. Only two of us followed through. In truth, it was not a decision I made with great forethought beyond this inside joke and a momentary reflection on my personal resonance with Berlant's work. Through an indictment of late-stage capitalism, Berlant motivated my reconsideration of the construction of time. Nevertheless, on this lazy Sunday, our colleague explained that they had learned the stick-and-poke method as a camp counsellor, plus they had a stash of sterile tattoo supplies. The knowledge acquired as a camp counsellor evokes something about the adolescent nature of the practice. Regardless, we indulged in the queer art form.

When my colleague gives me my CRUEL OPTIMISM tattoo, they pierce a single tattooing needle into my skin to create individual inked dots, and from these dots, they make lines out of more inked dots to form letters. Throughout the process, we take breaks to allow for some reprieve from the pain. My friend, the other tattoo recipient, and I take one quick shot of hard alcohol as if this will give us the nerve to power through the process. I look back and imagine us laughing as we do this. I have fondness for this

memory of pain: lying prone on the dusty carpet of a student apartment above a bar, our other companions crafted and painted while these words slowly became a part of my skin. Although these friendships have faded over time and circumstance, their impressions exist within the dots of the words on my thigh. This memory returns when asked about this tattoo; I recall the process as painful, joyful, and shared. Though this was my first stick-and-poke, it certainly was not my first or last tattoo. My body is a canvas and holds a sense of being incomplete, unfinished, and always in process.

5.2.2 *Palehound* and Bad Tattoos

In a song on their 2019 album *Black Friday* titled "Stick-N-Poke," queer indie musician El Kempner, known musically as Palehound, sings their chorus, "I think I'm due for a shitty tattoo" (2019). Lighthearted guitar riffs that serve as a grungy ode to surf-punk accompany these lyrics. Kempner's hurried verses evoke bodily discomfort, yet the softness in their voice becomes a salve for the listener. The stick-and-poke method bleeds between lines of missing someone else, presumably the tattooist in question. Kempner's lyrics offer a poetic detail of the realities of their queer embodiment:

> I sleep in late/it's such a waste/passing my youth in half days/can barely breathe without caffeine/ and water's what I want/ my body holds me like a prison/weeping, wilting, whistling/There is no winner/I skip dinner/They still want you thinner/I drove by and saw your car on the street/When it hit me/I think I'm due for a shitty tattoo (x3)/I only have these thoughts when I'm missing you. (Kempner, 2019)

I have been a fan of Kempner's music for a handful of years. Drawn to their confessional lyrics and indie-rock sound, I hear their queerness through allusions to astrology, stories

of heartbreak and existential melancholy, but also through the playfulness and refusal of mastery that oozes through the cracks of their imperfect voice. Their oeuvre archives their queer life, and thus I am intrigued by the way "stick-and-poke" shows up amongst these motifs and rites of passage.

Listening to this song, I become aware of the stick-and-poke tattoos that I have on my body and take with me. Exposing them feels a little personal, but also like a reclamation of some silliness, agency, and joy when the world feels heavy. I have a handful of them, some I received from friends, some I did on my own during the height of COVID-19 lockdowns. One stick-and-poke tattoo that I carry with me is rather abstract. I retrieved it during a fundraiser to support Indigenous land defenders. The abstract piece sits on my bicep, two soft rectangles containing wavy dotted lines, delicately poked in contrast to the bold lines of the machine tattoos on my forearm. Throughout its acquisition, I conversed with the artist, a friend of mine. They are an artist with many skills, but they do not regularly tattoo. They told me they intended to incorporate the dots of the stick-and-poke method into the piece's aesthetic. Because it is abstract, the tattoo has been open to multiple interpretations. I enjoy the interpretations of the tattoo that echo the beauty of the natural world: a friend once said it looks like water and waves, and another said it looks like the galaxy. Other interpretations have been entirely ridiculous. My friends make silly jokes about what else it might resemble. Not all amateur stick-and-pokes are abstract, but they are often imperfect – a dot or several astray, the shape slightly wonky, maybe a line intended to be crisp becomes blown-out and fuzzy.

5.2.3 T Fleischmann

Throughout their text, *Time is the Thing a Body Moves Through*, Fleischmann makes passing comments about their body as being tattooed with some subtle reference to the fact that some of these tattoos were not acquired professionally. Recounting the moments of a summer visit with a lover, they write:

> The summer doesn't pass any differently when Jackson returns to Australia, after his last morning when we get matching tattoos that say *NO BAD*, with a smiley face in the *O*, which Jackson pokes into my arm in the hurried moments before the airport. (2019, p. 46)

Fleischmann's choice of the word "pokes" implies that the tattoo was done manually by an amateur, stick-and-poke style. There is no other evidence to suggest otherwise: Jackson is not described as a tattoo artist, and the last-minute scenario evokes a rushed do-it-yourself-ness that is not usually afforded through a professional shop.

Further on in Fleischmann's text, they recall this tattoo as they reflect on language. During this section, they write that people can get caught up in the language of gender. Fleischmann rejects this prioritization, wanting personally to be "uninscribed by language," only to note their hypocrisy as they comment on some of the tattooed words on their body, including the NO BAD tattooed by Jackson (2019, p. 64). Finally, there is another mention of their tattoos when they encounter a younger generation of trans girls at a party with whom they find some affinity, albeit on a different timeline: "when I first came back to this party after a decade away," they write:

> There were two of these early-transition girls with the sides of their heads shaved and lots of lipstick, like a harder-edged version of how I used to dress when I was

> that age. Then the next month there were a few more…with so much purple hair (I used to have purple hair, many times) and their hair was also silver (my silver hair)…my knuckle tattoos graze their knuckle tattoos. (2019, p. 87)

It feels poignant that these personal aesthetic choices seem to repeat in some way, as though our queer kin are connected through an underground knowledge that circulates across and through generations. Despite these likenesses, Fleischmann seems to have difficulty connecting to this group. They find that when they try to talk with one another, the age gap creates a chasm of awkwardness at this party (2019, p. 87). While these are the only references to tattoos that appear within the text, the fact that they do exist offers us little glimpses into this underground communication and knowledge that perhaps a queer reader is positioned to notice.

5.2.4 #QTTR: *Queer Tattoo*

In 2022, Florian Rudolph, Benjamin Wolbergs, and Brody Polinsky, three Berlin-based queer tattoo artists, published a photographic anthology, *Queer Tattoo*, showcasing queer tattooers and their art. The project was collected through and inspired by the hashtag #QTTR that queer tattooers use on social media. Throughout the book, tattoo artists are interviewed about their experience in the industry. The editors and the interviewees note that even though tattoos are a more widely accepted art form, the industry is still rife with misogyny, queerphobia and transphobia. Thus, many of them discuss the importance of forging a pathway and community for queer tattooers and their work. The editors believe in the force of this community and the importance of documenting it, as these queer artists have carved out a place for themselves in tattooing while queering the traditions along the way (Rudolph et al., 2022, p. 8). I find this pertinent as I notice that within the

long-documented history of tattoos that we have thus far, very little scholarly attention has been paid to the connection between LGBTQIA2+ identities and tattooing in general.

The imagery and styles explored throughout the text have a wide span, with examples of black and gray illustration, abstract linework, bold colour usage, playful sketches reminiscent of children's drawings, and, notably, bodies and subjects that transgress cisnormativity and heteronormativity. While most artists featured seem to use conventional tattooing methods with machinery, Carlos Darder is an exception. The single image shown in the book of Darder's work is an ornamental and dainty piece that sits atop the back of someone's hand, extending slightly onto their forearm. The accompanying text states:

> Carlos Darder is known for their designs of angels which have a light and ethereal feel to them, possibly owing to their method of handpoking [sic] but maybe also influenced by their upbringing in the Balearic Islands. Carlos is fascinated by what is around them, the majority of what they design is taken from images they like, or things they find interesting while taking a walk, which could be anything from small plaster details of a building, an old coin from an antique store, or their favourite, the organic form of a flower. (Rudolph et al., 2022, p. 44)

Although the showcased tattooers use a wide variety of styles, Darder's piece differs in the shakiness and imperfection of the lines. This is not meant to disparage Darder's work, but you can see the dots made to create the imagery rather than a crisp line. The symmetry is slightly wonky.

The book mentions stick-and-poke one other time. In an interview with New York tattoo artist Francisca Silva, editor Polinsky asks, "at what age did you realize that you

could alter your body permanently by getting tattooed? Did you see anyone around?" Silva responds by saying, "at 16! I gave myself a tiny stick'n'poke [sic] with a sewing needle. I honestly have no idea where it came from because I don't remember seeing anybody with tattoos growing up." (Rudolph et al., 2022, p. 95). Silva's answer speaks to two aspects of the amateur queer stick-and-poke method that I find function within the aesthetics: it is something that someone can do at any age with any skill level; moreover, there is an adolescence to the practice, it feels like something someone does in their bedroom as a teenager in a moment of defiance, perhaps with friends.

5.3 Stick-and-Poke Aesthetics: *Embodying Art*

Palehound's song "Stick N Poke" exemplifies some of the ways in which our bodies are bound by chrononormativity. I interpret these lyrics from my position as a queer person from the same generation as the songwriter and suggest they can be relatable to queer millennials who feel the forces of many social pressures placed upon their embodiment. Kempner sings about how they sleep in late and require caffeine to function, conjuring a sense of consistent sleepiness that can be a direct consequence of attempting to keep up with the expectations of capitalism or chrononormativity. They also sing about "skipping dinner," which could be due to working late, but more likely, it is related to the pressure of needing to be thinner and take up less space. Kempner has openly addressed the pressure they have felt to change themselves to fit into typical beauty standards and noted that their embodiment was a big theme of *Black Friday*, the album on which "Stick N

Poke" features (Evans, 2019)[13]. Although they feel the burden of being in a body, that it "holds [them] like a prison," Kempner breaks away from these constraints by singing the chorus: "I think I'm due for a shitty tattoo!" (Palehound, 2019) The song format implies that the tattoo is a reprieve: a way of disrupting the temporal rhythm that regularly binds their embodiment. This section explores one overarching aesthetic form of the stick-and-poke tattoo: that it is a necessarily embodied art form. I demonstrate the embodiment of the hand-poked tattoo through the recipient's required presence during the process of obtaining the tattoo, the material reality that wearers always take the art form with them, and that our bodies and our tattoos are simultaneously in constant process. Through these examples, I investigate how the nature of this aesthetic affects our embodiment in a way that shifts our relationship to time. I suggest that the queer stick-and-poke tattoo thus allows for slowness, embodied connection, and a playfulness not afforded to queers within our normative construction of temporality.

As the art form requires the body as its canvas, tattooing can illuminate how we are necessarily embedded within our material body. Dominique Roux and Russell Belk research the consumption of tattoos through a phenomenological framework foregrounding the relevance of our material embodiment (2018). Drawing from Michel Foucault, they argue that the body is a "topia," meaning that it is a finite physical space. According to this view, we cannot escape our physical embodiment, and our bodies are spaces themselves through which we perceive the world. This material claim means we encounter other spatialities within our own "confined territory whose nature is revealed

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[13] Like Shannon Shaw, I revere Kempner as an indie artist whose fat embodiment offers possibility and temporality that sprawls beyond the stifling limitations of conventional body ideals.

by its topographies, territories, landscapes, and limits" (Roux & Belk, 2018, p. 491). This position aligns with my theoretical underpinnings of affect theory and queer phenomenology; our bodily constitution plays a role in the experiences of our spatial and temporal locations, and we are confined to using the body as a tool for perception. Roux and Belk refer to this as being "entrapped," but tattoos can be a way to make this entrapment align with our goals and desires. "Locating and visualizing tattoos," they write:

> Highlights how people use their bodies to escape or cope with reality to find themselves rightly emplaced. Though variously expressed by participants, meanings attached to the chosen designs highlight how tattoos are articulated with other time-spaces to which they connect through tattooing. (2018, p. 491)

Through an analysis of a series of interviews with tattoo collectors, Roux and Belk show how some people use tattoos to create narratives that make sense of how we are subjected to living within a body. They suggest that tattoos allow participants to "beautify" their bodies, connect to memories, visually mark one's convictions or sense of self, and express a desire to be elsewhere (2018). For these authors, the tattoo can simultaneously mark our embodiment's immutability and mutability. We are subjected to the materiality of our embodiment, but through this embodied aesthetic practice, we can rework our body to connect with other times and spaces. The content of the tattooed image and the narrative meaning it may have for the wearer works to create these imaginings. I add that we might achieve this through the queer stick-and-poke but expand it to foreground the unique process of receiving the manual tattoo that diverges from the conventional machine tattoo.

5.3.1 Present in the Process

The stick-and-poke is uniquely slow in a way that defies chrononormativity by requiring that the recipient be present for the creation of the tattoo. This reality has implications that become entangled to make room for queer joy and belonging. First, I suggest that using a process that refutes machinery and technological advancement invokes a sense of temporal drag, as offered by Elizabeth Freeman, challenging our ideas of linear progress. Next, I show how this relates to elements of the *l'art pour l'art* movement addressed in chapter three. Indeed, the tedium of hand-poking extends the process, reflecting the value of digressions and lingering that persists throughout this thesis. I also explore how the recipient's presence integrates them into the meaning-making process of the art form; the recipient's affective contours of their present embodiment become part of the art form. While *process* recurs throughout the stick-and-poke's aesthetics, this section focuses on the temporal space of receiving the tattoo.

Returning to tattooing without the aid of a machine in the twenty-first century is a unique experience for the tattoo recipient that recalls a past method perhaps now considered 'outdated.' I argue that stick-and-poke tattoo's resistance to machinery rejects chrononormative ideas of technological advancement and creates a process through which the participants engage a version of *temporal drag* that anchors us to a slow temporality by bringing forth outdated modes of tattooing. Freeman discusses temporal drag through short film and performance art, suggesting that art engaging in temporal drag works to "unsituate viewers from the present tense they think they know" (2010, p. 61). Freeman shows how aesthetics can manifest temporal drag. For example, embracing a sartorial style from another period might create this tension in time (2010, p. 70). She

relates this to the context of "lesbian feminism," along with the proliferation of queer studies and queer theory in academia, pop culture, and activism, where the "lesbian feminist is cast as the big drag" (2010, p. 62). The lesbian feminist, through this framework, no longer feels relevant and is emblematic of a past political movement. For example, when an artwork uses bygone aesthetics, such as those characteristic of the early lesbian feminist, these artistic choices can:

> Work against our own neoconservative tendency to consign to the irretrievable past anything that challenges a dominant vision of the future—and also remind us that social progressives have a tendency to be too easily embarrassed by earlier political moments. (2010, p. 72).

Indeed, it is not the case that political movements progress forward so neatly. Freeman cautions us from considering activism in such linear terms and reminds us that the past continues to exist in the present; many issues are not wholly overcome, and many people do not move along with the pace of the zeitgeist. Aesthetics, in this way, then have the capacity to create dissonance through temporal drag.

The outdated process of acquiring the stick-and-poke is thus a pertinent aesthetic form. While contextualizing the artform, I have shown that technology and artistic skill have ostensibly advanced within tattooing. By valuing the manual process of hand-poking, we might be refusing the contemporary tattooing industry. I suggest that this might also resist how capitalism and social media have made an art form previously considered 'folk art' more ubiquitous but less accessible to people without disposable income or living in financial precarity. Although historically the machination of the tattoo made it more accessible to working-class demographics, an additional shift has occurred

in the twenty-first century, reducing working-class access to the art form. I suggest this return to a manual method aesthetically feels closer to the lower-class or working-class tattoo. The stick-and-poke, as I show later, is relatively easy to do oneself, making it somewhat more accessible. Alternatively, the technological and artistic advancements that proliferate in the mainstream industry have increased the tattoo's commodified value. Later, I show that the more mainstream and 'acceptable' tattoos are often thoroughly planned and highly technical. These are also now more costly, certainly more so than the queer DIY version. The aesthetic of the outdated process reminds us that technological advancement leaves many ideas and people behind. Therefore, the stick-and-poke's manual labour potentially drags us backward or elsewhere, resisting the idea of forward, linear movement.

Moreover, the stick-and-poke's refusal of machinery rejects chrononormativity by minimizing efficiency. I connect this to the *l'art pour l'art* movement heralded by dandies and aristocrats such as Oscar Wilde. When analyzing the portrait of Wilde at the Met in my third chapter, I noted the significance of his involvement with "aestheticism" or "art pour l'art," which directly rejected the mass production of art that became possible through the Industrial Revolution at the turn of the nineteenth century (Glick, 2001). Although Wilde's participation in this movement is helmed by his aristocracy, making the connection less straightforward, I nonetheless suggest that the resistance to the hyperproduction of machinery is pertinent here. The tattoo machine, which can prick your skin with a needle from 50-3000 times per minute, is substantially faster than a person manually poking at their own speed (Rosenkilde, 2015). According to aestheticism, mass production diminished the one-of-a-kind value of art that was

painstakingly created by hand (Glick, 2001). While the use of a tattoo machine does not necessarily mean that the pieces created are identical—in fact, some suggest that because the canvas or human body upon which the tattoo is created is always different, even repeated flash designs are never truly identical (DeMello, 2000)—there is, I believe, value in how it evades the way machination and automation have drastically changed our temporal circumstances. I have also spoken about the strenuous, fast-paced nature of hyperproductive capitalism through Freeman's work on how capitalism has dovetailed neatly with the solidification of the nuclear family. Through this, machinery was (and continues to be) created to minimize the appearance of labour (for example, the oven or the washing machine), which works to create more "time" for the user, wherein they are then expected to *do* more and thus *produce* more (Freeman 2010). Therefore, I argue that choosing to acquire a tattoo through a slow, embodied process, despite speedier alternatives existing, is partly a rejection of this linear forward speed of late-stage capitalism, in which we want things done quickly. In this sense, the process is deliberately longer than it needs to be.

This dawdling and slowness of the stick-and-poke can be *felt*, representing important digressions. Insofar as hand-poking creates additional labour, it does not follow a straightforward path, invoking an Ahmedian deviation from linearity or straight time (2006b). Much like the way Fleischmann and Benjy lingered in their creation (or lack thereof) of "Squirt!" and "Cranberry Squirt," this lengthy process provides the opportunity to inhabit and prolong existing within the in-between (2019). We are physically required to linger in the space of artistic creation beyond what is putatively necessary in a chrononormative framework. Just as Fleischmann and Benjy found value

and significance through their tarrying, the process of receiving or creating the stick-and-poke opens potential moments of belonging and joy. By resisting chrononormativity, this new temporal space allows for an embodied reprieve from the demand of hyperproductivity, offering a sense of belonging. Additionally, our dallying creates opportunities for shared laughter, connection, and meaning.

When I reflect on my own experiences of receiving a stick-and-poke, the process was not so much about the content of the words or imagery that became a part of my skin, but the connection I shared with those present and the intentional time we found to create together. As I contend that queers have been giving each other stick-and-poke tattoos in old apartments and friends' bedrooms, I consider that this creates space for revelling in artistic creation with a friend on one's own time. These moments are not subject to the commodification of the tattoo or a professional artist's busy schedule: charging by the hour and hoping to squeeze in another client today. This echoes elements of the nature of live performance that became pertinent to the affective atmosphere at the *Hunx and His Punx* show. Like an audience, the tattoo recipient becomes directly engaged with the meaning-making that is present for the process. The recipient can choose placement, design, and suggest adjustments to the piece. Moreover, the moments of laughter, the pauses taken to shift positions or break from the pain (or, as my friend and I did back in 2018, take a shot of alcohol), also become integral to the process of creating. The significant moments found through the manual process are also evident through Fleischmann's connection to the art form. As their lover gives them a stick-and-poke before running off to a flight, this time together becomes a pertinent aesthetic. I postulate that there is still slowness here: even as Jackson is rushing off to the airport to

leave, the tattoo reappears later in their work, representing how the piece and its creation stretch beyond these hurried moments (2019). It is a continued temporal space shared by both parties, which becomes a part of Fleischmann's embodiment.

Palehound begins "Stick N Poke" by singing: "Their eyes are glinting/mouths are twisting/holding back the gimmick/my knees are failing/chest is wailing/shaking in my core/they hold my body like its nothing/Pinching, pushing, prodding" (2019). I also want to emphasize the physicality of receiving a stick-and-poke tattoo: pain is often involved. Pain is a subjective experience and a thread of inquiry that expands beyond this thesis's purview. Nonetheless, I consider pain through Freeman's conception of erotohistoriography (2010). Pain is a conduit through which we can behold erotohistoriographic ruptures in time that allow us the capacity to connect to queer history. Given my suggestion that the stick-and-poke tattoo is not an uncommon queer experience, the pain felt during the process might invoke something akin to a rite of passage or connection with other queers who also engage in stick-and-poke tattooing. When I experience the pain of a stick-and-poke tattoo, the needle pricking the skin slowly, I am experiencing a similar (although not identical) pain to perhaps those queers who have been poked in the past. When Fleischmann describes receiving a stick-and-poke, they elicit my own encounter with the art form. Invoking a feeling from a past moment brings it into the present, or an otherwise. In this alternative time, we might connect through feeling a shared pain. Erotohistoriography through shared pain moves with us into the following section: after receiving the tattoo, we carry the art with us on our bodies as we move through the world.

5.3.2 Bringing Art Everywhere

Unlike the canvas from which Oscar Wilde smirks down at me in the Met, unlike the evening of queercore debauchery in Brooklyn with *Hunx and his Punx*, and unlike the Fleischmann text, I take my tattoos wherever I go. Although I have argued that these prior examples provide ephemeral temporal spaces of queer joy and belonging, and José Esteban Muñoz suggests these linger with us (2009), the tattoo imagery is quite literally on my body. Carrying the art necessarily with us has an affective resonance that is pertinent to queer joy and belonging. A variety of factors mediate how we might feel in a space: this includes how we are orientated in that space by our histories and identities (Ahmed, 2006b), the other bodies and objects present, and the feelings that might already exist within a room (Gregg and Siegworth, 2010; Anderson, 2009). This means that an infinite number of elements are at play that, as Rosenberg and Sharp suggest, can create an "affective atmosphere" (2018). Rosenberg and Sharp argue that the practice of queer tattooing has the potential to subvert the hetero and cisnormativity that has existed in punk spaces (2018). I further this claim by extending it to spaces beyond where we might *expect* to meet other queer people. There is a difference between carrying and displaying a tattoo that is deemed socially acceptable and carrying and displaying a tattoo that challenges the current palatability of the art form.

Even as many of my stick-and-pokes are not always visible, I carry these tattoos and their histories into whatever space I enter. In my second chapter's discussion on "ingesting art," I show how Fleischmann's experience of the Félix González-Torres candy spill carries beyond the museum walls through the ingestion of the candy from the piece *Untitled (A Portrait of Ross in L.A.)*. They continue to refer to these moments and

the candy from the exhibition throughout the text. By ingesting the candy, Fleischmann *feels* and *experiences* a historical event in a method of perception that moves beyond a conventional historiography that discourages embodying history. Through this, they engage in erotohistoriography (Freeman, 2010). The sweetness Fleischmann tastes becomes an embodied moment of González-Torres's pleasure with their lover, Ross, that Fleischmann encounters through their own body. Like the sweetness of the candy, I believe the presence of stick-and-poke tattoos can offer moments of feeling history as we move throughout the world. As discussed above, the process of receiving a tattoo is deeply embodied and felt; through a queer phenomenological lens, this affective history also comes with us when we bring the stick-and-poke into other spaces. This, I suggest, opens up the potential for connection as we move throughout the world, as the art, like ourselves, is dynamic.

It is relevant here to draw on my examples of tattoos from Fleischmann. Despite desiring to be "uninscribed by language," they have words tattooed all over their body (Fleischmann, 2019, p. 64). When encountering a slightly younger generation of trans and queer folks at a party, they find connections within their choices of aesthetics in personal appearance. When they write, "their knuckle tattoos graze mine," I can feel these moments as rich with shared knowledge. I interpret this section to acknowledge shared experiences despite different social and political circumstances. Fleischmann's perspective, which seems to imply some disengagement and ultimate frustration with the priorities of the queer activism of a younger generation, is informed by their social location and experiences. This example poses a challenge to my thesis: I argue that stick-and-poke tattoos have the potential for recognizing shared pain and embodiment through

the process, and yet Fleischmann does not find a connection with these folks. However, this does not preclude the fact that some shared knowledge is brought into these moments. Fleischmann still sees parts of themself within this younger generation. Their experiences are of course, different, but something is palpably shared. Despite this example falling short of deep, affective connection, bringing our tattooed histories with us nonetheless opens up this potentiality.

Bringing our tattoos with us throughout time and space offers potential connection with others. Moreover, this movement also means that the context of the stick-and-poke will always be in flux. Gretchen Larsen, Maurice Patterson, and Lucy Markham address the complexities of what this might mean for tattooed persons when mitigating the perceived deviance of tattooing (2014). They argue that although the acceptance of tattooing has increased over time and the landscape of the industry has grown, there are still a variety of reasons for why tattooed persons might feel stigmatized due to their tattoos. Historically, tattoos have had a variety of meanings that are culturally, socially, politically, spiritually, spatially, and temporally dependent. While tattooing has undoubtedly been a large part of some deviant cultures, they are not the only subcultures to value tattooing. As I have shown, this does not mean tattoos have become accepted wholesale. Thus, many tattooed persons feel as though they still must manage potential stigma. How they do this depends on their circumstances. Larsen et al. cite the example of a tattooed person in a library (2019). They write: “The seemingly nonthreatening environment of a library negates the ‘stigma of deviance’ associated with the tattoos. However, when viewed in a stigmatized setting (a neighborhood perceived as dangerous), the tattoo is understood as a signifier of deviance” (2019, p. 675). This means

the stigma surrounding tattoos and tattooing also depends on the space in which the person is perceived.

While my conversation is not necessarily interested in "stigma" and tattooing itself, this offers a pertinent observation: tattoos and their meanings/interpretations change in relation to their context. Because we carry them everywhere, their affective aesthetics are open to constant reinterpretation. This fluidity in meaning highlights the shifting nature of something deemed permanent. Moreover, it shows that recognizing the embodied nature of tattoos and how we carry them with us has the capacity to shift the affective meaning of the space. As Rosenberg and Sharp suggest, the presence of queer tattoos, and in my case, queer stick-and-poke tattoos, work to shape the contours of a space. Beverly Yuen Thompson writes about the semiotics of fashion and dress in academic spaces, noting that tattooed academic professionals might feel the need to hide or manage the appearance of their tattoos (2020). She suggests, however, that inked skin can be a way to enact the Bakhtinian "carnivalesque," showing a disruption of the expected in the institution (Thompson, 2020, p. 4). Thus, there is the potential to subvert the dynamics of an exclusionary space through the presence and aesthetics of a tattoo. In doing so, tattoo wearers might offer some resistance to the chrononormative systems that these institutions represent. By providing this potential rift, even if minute, I also add that tattoos can be nodes of connection with others in search of similar reprieve in more conventional spaces. Fleischmann brings theirs to a party of queer and trans folks. If stick-and-poke tattoos come along with us into traditionally exclusionary spaces, we might be able to find connection with someone else who feels the constraint of chrononormativity, particularly as that institution might enforce it. Therefore, the

presence of these aesthetics can affectively shift the space, *and* they can offer possibility for queer belonging where it is unexpected. I can consider the example of how it might *feel* to be at a conference and find another early-career academic with a stick-and-poke tattoo. Through the shared experience of the practice and the histories that we bring forth, there is the *potential* for connection: to create with someone else an alternative temporal space that values the art of the hand-poked amateur tattoo. This offers a possible opening into an otherwise, even if just for a moment.

5.3.3 Bodies and Tattoos in Process

As mentioned, I argue that the tattoo, like our embodiment, shifts throughout time and space. This flux challenges the preconceived notion of permanency associated with the art form. While it may literally be inscribed on our skin for the rest of our bodily existence, the tattoo itself is subject to shifting and changing. The setting of the tattoo changes when we move through the world, but additionally, as we age, our body undergoes various processes that will affect the tattoo (Serup et al., 2015). The shape might stretch and change with our bodies, or the lines might fade over time, becoming less bold than they once were. The materials and the canvas are subject to degradation, like any other art form. Moreover, our bodies are also temporally finite, and the art only remains as long as we do. Rosenberg and Sharp write that “tattoos traditionally manifest within a material ephemerality, existing within the consistently decaying format of the human body… they exist within material spaces that are physically accessible yet fragile, liminal and often time limited” (2018, p. 164). Thus, the tattoo is not truly permanent. I suggest that the deviancy often associated with tattooing is somewhat connected to its perceived permanence. For example, as outlined in the historical contextualization of

tattoos, they maintained their cultural popularity after the Tattoo Renaissance, which prioritized *meaningful* tattoos. Researchers find that meaningful tattoos are those that are supposedly well-thought-out, suggesting that they will *always* be meaningful (Patterson and Schroeder, 2010; Larsen et al., 2014). This seems to imply static embodiment alongside static selfhood as if there are quintessential parts of our being that will always remain. Nevertheless, like our embodiment, or more precisely like a fluid queer and trans embodiment, the tattoo is often in process. It might physically change in appearance (there is also always the option of cover-ups or removal), but our relationship to the tattoo and its meaning can always shift over time.

While exploring the relationship tattooed women have with their tattoos through a gendered lens, Nina Nyman further challenges the permanency of the art form (2017). Her analysis highlights the shifting nature of our self-conception alongside our embodiment. I contend that this emphasizes process as a pertinent aesthetic form of the stick-and-poke that is carried out in various ways. While discussing how her research informants chose what images they wanted as tattoos, Nyman writes:

> All of [the participants] are conscious of having changed at some point, which means that they might change again. In all three cases they refer to feeling; to finding tattoos appealing; to feel that you know what you want; to think with the heart and not with the head. What they do is describe an affective relation to tattoos; a relation open to change and to contradictions, based in the body, and dependent on feelings. Affectivity, according to Braidotti, regulates the truth-value of an idea. Braidotti describes affectivity as the opposite to phallogocentrism, where phallogocentrism represents linear thinking. (2017, P. 88)

I have argued that the tattoo's meaning and interpretation might shift depending on physical circumstances. However, this excerpt shows that our relationships to our bodies and experiences are also in constant flux. This reflects Gilles Deleuze's and Felix Guattari's concept of "becoming" which Nyman draws from writing that "the self is involved in constant process of becoming something other than it is, and this process involves both material, bodily, and psychological changes" (2017, p. 83). This notion challenges our concept of the tattoo's permanence while also bringing forth another queer aesthetic connection that values the process and constant becoming as an in-between state, defying neat categorization in a linear sense. The instability in meaning is much like the fluidity of queerness. As I have outlined that valuing the *process* is a queer aesthetic form via Jack Halberstam, I also make way to value this through the shifting nature of the tattoo. Its physical form, meaning, interpretation, and attached narrative might consistently change. If we allow for and value the fluidity of the tattoo rather than rigid meaning (such as considering 'It must *always* be meaningful'), we find moments situated outside of a linear and static narrative we might associate with a chrononormative worldview. This fluidity, in turn, partially contributes to how the stick-and-poke offers new affective temporalities. However, the following section enriches the affective potential of the stick-and-poke's aesthetics. I suggest that this allowance for constant process and becoming makes room for creativity and playfulness often stifled by deeming something as permanent; this becomes clear through the queer stick-and-poke's incorporation of "bad art."

5.4 5. Stick-and-Poke Aesthetics: *Bad Art*

In this section, I refer to stick-and-poke tattoos as "bad" art. While it is not possible to neatly divide art between what is "bad" and what is "good," I use "bad art" as a term to distinguish a group of aesthetic properties characteristic of the queer stick-and-poke tattoo. When Kempner sings, "I think I'm due for a shitty tattoo," I know exactly what they mean: stick-and-pokes offer something imperfect and not quite good enough for the increasing standards of tattooing. Alongside this description of the tattoo, the song's chorus provides a tonal shift through a surf-punk riff that offers a complex lightheartedness that I suggest might feel akin to the queer joy found through creating art regardless of quality. Palehound's song evokes a queer feeling of making and enjoying art, even if it is "shitty." I suggest that the DIY and amateur quality of queer stick-and-poke tattoos is an aesthetic form that offers more room for playfulness that is not always afforded through art forms constrained by conventional artistic standards. Here I will show how stick-and-pokes resist tattoos' commodification by exploring the DIY practice's visual aesthetics, which reflect imperfection, amateurism, and, I argue, an adolescent mode. These aspects challenge the sense of linearity and perfection often valued within our chrononormative world.

Given my discussion thus far, I postulate that tattoos are more likely to be socially acceptable if they are considered "good" by these standards: they are appropriately meaningful to the wearer, and they are completed with relevant artistic merit. The idea that tattoos must be appropriately meaningful, while not always explicit, underlies much of the literature, and undergirds the tattoo's growing popularity and detachment from deviance (DeMello, 2000). Above, I discussed the tattoo's *meaning* as it might

consistently fluctuate along with our embodiment. Here, I discuss how contemporary tattoos that have aligned with chrononormativity also stipulate that they ought to have *sufficient* meaning, whereas stick-and-pokes subvert this expectation. For example, McGuire and Chrisler analyze interviews with trans youth regarding their various forms of body art. The authors advocate for the significance of body art for these youth but do so with the qualification that most participants were thoughtful about their art choices (2016, p. 114); further, theorists explore the meaning behind tattoos as marking memories or helping individuals create a "sense of temporal order" through choosing art with careful planning (Steadman, et al., 2019); outlining what is considered appropriate for more "high-brow" tattoo magazines, DeMello notes that the narratives surrounding tattoo choices reflect particular themes:

> Those who are interviewed include students, secretaries, artists, teachers…and other members of the middle class considered respectable. The interviewees convey the idea that tattoos are meaningful, well thought out, and palatable from a middle-class perspective. The interviewees tend to emphasize themes drawn from self-help, New Age, or feminism discourses to explain their tattoos. (2000, p. 100)

DeMello notes that themes of deep "meaning" and planning were highlighted to justify the tattoo as an acceptable art form within the mainstream middle-class. While I argue that the stick-and-poke has the potential to be meaningful for queer joy and belonging, I am not suggesting that the imagery and content of the tattoo itself must have some profound meaning. Rather, I think there is value in getting a stick-and-poke for the sake of the stick-and-poke itself or, as I propose, for the aesthetic forms it offers and the queer experience of receiving it. Moreover, the possibility for impulsivity offered through the

hand-poke's DIY nature might encourage crude, silly, or inane imagery. This possibility pushes back against the narratives of which tattoos are considered acceptable in our current social context, contributing to why stick-and-pokes might be "bad art."

Part of the stick-and-poke's queer charm, I argue, is how the unique physical method is evident within the tattoo's imagery. Again, the process is significant, and because of this, the stick-and-poke results may diverge from the contemporary conventional tattoo made with a machine. The hand-poke artist must manually puncture the skin[14]. Keeping the inked needle relatively perpendicular to the skin, the artist will pierce through the epidermis and into the dermis with a downward motion and remove the needle gently. The piercing creates a vacuum through which the ink is absorbed into the dermis layer. Yet, each puncture merely creates a small dot, its size dependent upon the size of the needle used. The artist will continue this process by creating a series of small dots to form the linework of the tattoo. Often, it requires a couple of "passes," meaning the artist will go over the dotted lines again to build up the amount of ink and eventually create a crisp line (*How to stick and poke,* n.d.). As noted, a tattoo machine also uses dotting but does so at a much faster pace. The machine artist can drag their implement along quickly, creating a crisp line. Because of this difference, there is a chance that a stick-and-poke line can look wonky or fuzzy, with its dots being uneven or astray; the process might become visible in the piece. If the artist is well-practiced, they can tattoo a solid line that might be indistinguishable from a line created with a machine. Nonetheless, I argue that queer stick-and-poke tattoos can embrace imperfection,

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[14] Stick-and-poke methods can now be found readily online, but I will also note that it is something I have personally learned through practice and by watching and talking with other self-taught artists.

amateurism, and “low-brow” art that has historically been associated with the deviance of the tattoo. Stick-and-pokes thereby have the potential to resist the mainstreaming of tattoos and the ways in which, as DeMello writes, tattoos have become more “palatable” for middle-class sensibilities (2000, p. 100).

The context from which I am writing still values something determined to have artistic merit through the proliferation of methods and styles via increased access to technology and exposure to many styles (Kosut, 2014; Force, 2022). Notably, many stick-and-poke artists are establishing professional careers out of their practice in this expanding industry. However, I am talking about the do-it-yourself tattoo: the tattoo Kathleen Hanna gets in an apartment with a punk band; the queer friends who are not professional artists but want to tattoo each other anyway; and the spontaneous tattoo that comes about simply because a friend has the materials. While it is crucial to stick-and-poke safely with constant attention to proper sanitization (*Stick and poke tattoo kit*, n.d.; Serup et al., 2015), the method does not require much technical skill to administer. However, even practiced artists might want to embrace a style that deviates from what is now considered to be an acceptable tattoo. When receiving my abstract stick-and-poke by my artist friend, the delicate dotted lines were created with the intention of showcasing the stick-and-poke method; the process becomes visually integrated into the art. This is also illustrated through the work of Carlos Darder in *Queer Tattoo* (Rudolph et al., 2022). The showcased piece does not have neat, clean lines and stands in contrast to other tattoos in the book. The individual dots manually poked to create the ornamental design on the wrist remain visible in the photograph (Rudolph et al., 2022, p. 44). Without belittling Darder’s work, some would consider this a “bad” tattoo, based on previously

outlined standards. Although there are technological advancements that would aid in creating pieces with more artistic merit, the stick-and-poke resists this. The stick-and-poke is, therefore, an art form that can be valued outside of the gatekeeping of institutions, as these standards bleed into the larger tattooing industry.

Valuing bad art through the amateur stick-and-poke, insofar as it is not good enough for the ever-growing mainstream standard of tattooing, coincides with my discussion in the previous chapter on the DIY aesthetic of the performers at the *Hunx and His Punx* concert. According to theorist Curran Nault, the DIY punk aesthetic embraces the messiness of the do-it-yourself ethos, rejecting the need for mastery in creating art (2018). Like the painted and patched garments of Bogart and his crew, stick-and-poke can be valued for the transparency of the process within the piece. Muñoz's discussion of art that displays a "means" suggests that there is a potentiality for queer utopia here:

> Performances that display and illuminate their means are, like punk, a modality of performance that is aesthetically and politically linked to populism and amateurism. The performative work of "means," in the sense I am using it, is to interrupt aesthetics and politics that aspire toward totality. (2009, p. 100)

For Muñoz, aesthetics and politics that value the end, like the idea that capitalism is inevitable, preclude the potentiality for an otherwise, or other ways of being in the world. Rather, a utopian aesthetic and politics will not be prescriptive and will embrace the constant process of becoming, echoing the importance of the body and tattoo as in constant process. Indeed, this aesthetic nature offers something beyond what is valued through the rigidity and linearity of chrononormativity, further becoming affectively

pertinent for the person who is regularly constrained by these normative temporal mappings.

The imperfection of the stick-and-poke tattoo created by the amateur allows room for potential playfulness. The stick-and-poke's resistance to totality means that it falls short of success and fails to meet the standards of art laid out for us. Because when we want to measure up to the standards determined by others, we are, in a sense, asking to be 'taken seriously.' In arguing for the queer aesthetics of failure, Halberstam writes:

> Being taken seriously means missing out on the chance to be frivolous, promiscuous, and irrelevant. The desire to be taken seriously is precisely what compels people to follow the tried and true paths of knowledge production around which I would like to map a few detours. (2011, p. 6).

There is a connection between the celebration of failure that seems to encourage playfulness, a way of being in this world that is not stifled by the confines of societal expectations. When my second tattooist allows the individual dots of the stick-and-poke to shine through, they develop a style that provides an alternative to the clean, crisp, bold lines of conventional tattooing. Instead, I have a delicate piece that contrasts with the severity of these lines. By visually incorporating the means of creation and rejecting mastery, we not only allow for the art of the amateur and the art of failure, but we are playful in opening possibilities for existing otherwise in the world.

I extend this amateurism and playfulness to suggest that the stick-and-poke is also evocative of adolescence, and by practicing this method, queers are engaging in a backward practice, delaying the imposed finality of adulthood. Throughout the stick-and-poke vignettes that frame this chapter, I noted a few moments of possible childishness or

adolescence: my friend had learned the practice as a camp counsellor; in *Queer Tattoo,* a now accomplished tattoo artist began by giving themself a stick-and-poke as a teenager (Rudolph et al., 2022). I postulate that it is likely that some youth who want a tattoo and are barred by age or parental restrictions might practice the stick-and-poke; they then take this piece with them as they age, perhaps marking a piece of continued adolescence. It is equally subversive when adults beyond these prescribed adolescent years engage in the practice. Adolescence, in its imperfection, awkwardness, embarrassment, and often defiance, is a stage we must pass through to reach a theoretically 'fully-formed' adult self. Halberstam writes that "failure preserves some of the wondrous anarchy of childhood and disturbs the supposedly clean boundaries between adults and children, winners and losers" (2011, p. 3). Embracing the amateur nature of the stick-and-poke returns us to an adolescence, challenging prescribed linearity. Queers participate in subcultures, like punk, drag, and nightclub spaces, longer than is expected rather than moving on to the life events imposed through cisheteronormativity (Halberstam, 2005). I suggest that by channelling our inner angsty teen through a process of stick-and-poke, we go back in time or bring the past into the present. Whichever way feels impactful to the queer stick-and-poke participant, adopting this adolescent mode means rejecting the forward march of chrononormativity. Through this practice and its childlike defiance and resistance to perfectionism, we can create a slower time, a new world in which we might begin to unbind in a momentary reprieve.

5.5 Conclusion: Embodying Bad Art

The tattoo as an art form is emblematic of complex webs of innumerable histories, and the queer stick-and-poke is a small yet significant part of this. Despite the mainstreaming of the conventional tattoo and its subsumption into capitalism and institutional standards of art, queers continue to find ways to creatively resist by making art through their own means. These examples show that this DIY practice is an art form that can disrupt and reconfigure our embodied relationships to temporality. Through the arduous, lengthy, irreverent process, marginalized queers create and take time for themselves to dwell in creativity and playfulness. While pushing back against prescriptive notions of aesthetic acceptability, the hand-poked tattoo might constitute 'bad art.' Nonetheless, by illuminating the amateur process and evoking a feeling of imperfect and awkward adolescence, the stick-and-poke's aesthetics challenge a chrononormative worldview.

Throughout my dissertation, I contend that queer joy coexists with the knowledge that the world is still not made for queers. Lingering in the process, both painful and joyous, is itself an opportunity for connection and shared experience with those present. As we take these tattoos with us into different spaces, there is a potential to find other counter-cultural queers who have similar experiences. Perhaps this pain and laughter represent our shared historical and emotional pain and the joy we nevertheless create amidst it. I began the chapter with an epigraph from a documentary on the queercore movement that features iconic punk feminist Kathleen Hanna. She recalls receiving a stick-and-poke tattoo at the apartment of Leslie Mah, a member of queercore band *Tribe 8*, marveling at the significant moment. As she speaks, she lifts a pant leg to reveal a wonky and faded star tattoo, and her face is bright with the queer memory (Leyser 2017).

While my context and experiences are different, I feel something shared between us, Palehound, and Fleischmann, and all the queers who have decided to tattoo each other on a whim. Queer stick-and-poke tattoos, then, are potential conduits for feelings of queer belonging and queer joy. Forging time for silliness, laughter, connection, and reprieve through the art we make for ourselves, I suggest, will continue to be a metaphorical middle finger to capitalism and cisheteronormativity.

Conclusion

6 Conclusion

My work points to some of the joy inherent in this life, showing it to be as much of the present moment as it is of the future.

– Benjy Russell (*Bio*, n.d.)

This project has demonstrated the capacity of art and aesthetics to reconfigure our relationship to time. The examined artistic pieces and encounters show that despite the material circumstances of chrononormativity and growing queer and transphobic oppression in the late 2010s and 2020s North America, queers nonetheless create time for joy and belonging. Undergirded by the theoretical frameworks of queer phenomenology, queer temporality, and affect theory, I contend that queer identities are subject to embodied discordance through the constant attempt to keep up with hyperproductive capitalism. Given that we might consistently feel as though we are out of step with the supposedly natural rhythm of chrononormativity, a queer sense of belonging might be a moment in which we feel reprieve: time to dawdle, take a breath, and laugh together. Political activism and reconstruction are necessary for creating a more just world. Yet, I look for moments outside of capitalism, normativity, and moments unburdened by the responsibility of structural change. Queer subjects can feel joy and belonging through valuing aesthetics that subvert linear temporal structures. While knowledge of the unjust world that awaits us always remains proximate, queer subjects can feel joy and belonging through valuing aesthetics that subvert linear temporal structures. By exploring the examples discussed in my chapters, I show that queers have been taking and creating alternative temporalities through aesthetic engagements for themselves.

6.1 Documenting Queer Joy and Belonging through Art

My second chapter uncovers how art fosters queer belonging. Through a layered aesthetic analysis of T Fleischmann's accounts of encountering and creating art, I exemplify how the affects of queer joy and belonging might be created and transmitted through various art forms. By attending to how they narrate their encounters, I show how the multiple aesthetics of these art pieces, when read queerly, affectively shift Fleischmann, and possibly the reader's, embodied relationship to temporality. By engaging with their experience of work by late Latinx artist Félix González-Torres, I show how art can create a new temporal space that allows for a sense of relief for the individual who might experience queer embodied discordance. Through a phenomenological and affective lens, I discuss how persons come to art through their subjective embodiment, which plays a role in their experience of the piece. Through Fleischmann's interpretation of *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.),* I exemplify how a queer sense of belonging is a feeling cultivated through a moment of embodied reprieve outside of chrononormativity.

This second chapter also shows how art can cultivate the affect of queer joy. I outline queer joy in response to Sara Ahmed's concerns with the contemporary promise of happiness as a neoliberal and capitalist project. I suggest that queer joy is an affect that occurs in tandem with understanding or knowledge of the harms in the normative world. By relishing the process and digressions Fleischmann and their friend Benjy take through creating art, they subvert the demands of linear time. This subversive temporal space cultivates queer joy. The affects of a queer sense of belonging and a queer joy, I argue, are interrelated in that they can easily become conduits for one another. The time created

to allow ourselves to dwell, linger, and perhaps breathe in relief can also be a moment conducive to laughter in the absurd. I conclude this chapter by gesturing to ways these affects might be favourable conditions for queer connection or queer community. Creating new temporal spaces via the affective nature of art and aesthetics can connect us with others who might feel drawn to or at ease in this temporality. This chapter shows that despite the exclusionary nature of chrononormativity, queers find and create joy and belonging through art.

My third chapter investigates the elusive world of 'camp' via my visit to the 2019 exhibition "Camp: Notes on Fashion," curated by the Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. I attended this exhibition with some cynicism based on the capitalism and elitism of the institution alongside the oversaturated media coverage of mainstream celebrities attending the exorbitantly priced Met Gala. Yet, to my surprise, I experienced a profound moment during the exhibit that affected me greatly. I suggest that the curation of the camp objects, drawing on the influences of figures of 'failure' such as Oscar Wilde and Judy Garland while highlighting the playfulness and absurdity of a camp sensibility, held the possibility of invoking a queer sense of belonging: a temporality of momentary reprieve from chrononormativity through which we might connect to others via our knowledge of the private code of camp.

However, I hold my fondness for this experience in tandem with the discomfort felt through subsequent theorizing and reflection. I argue that because this exhibit was still held in a predominantly white, capitalist, and elitist institution, it was limited in its openness to queer joy. Queer joy acknowledges that this world is not enough as it is. Yet, a phenomenological account of queer curatorship and the perspective of Queer of Colour

scholars reveals that the exhibit ignores significant aspects of camp. The exhibit starkly excluded the Black contributions to camp and prioritized white stories and artifacts. This information produces tension in my feelings for the exhibit and retroactively shapes my memory. However, it does not necessarily negate my experience of the queer moment. Because queer temporality resists the rigidity of straight time, these moments are constantly in flux. This additional information enriches the moment, reminding me that a queer joy cannot be cultivated without the recognition that the world, as it is, continues to marginalize the knowledges and experiences of Black queers and Queers of Colour. Although imperfect, I find some meaning in the nature of the exhibit's aesthetics and curation. I value the fluid nature of a camp sensibility and weave threads of playfulness and absurdity throughout the project. But ultimately, I am left unsatisfied and more willing to explore the creation of art for and by queers outside of the height of the mainstream and without the backing of such large institutions. It is a reminder that queers do not need to wait for the acceptance or embrace of the mainstream to create and feel joy.

By immersing myself in the underground culture of queercore through the live performance of *Hunx and His Punx* in my fourth chapter, I show how the multiple levels of aesthetics in live performance can create shared temporalities between the audience and performers. The live performance offered a singular opportunity to bring together these individuals in a unique temporal moment which was constituted in and through the multitude of aesthetic elements that contributed to the affective atmosphere (Anderson, 2009). I reveal how the performance encapsulates more than simply the music, integrating elements of clothing, gesture, and fat aesthetics. The convergence of these

particular bodies created a temporal space that celebrated effeminacy and queerness as meaning was co-created by the participants. Bogart's campy body language and Shaw's powerful fat presence were both exalted, creating a space outside the constraints of chrononormativity. The crowd and the performers could dwell in moments of togetherness, revisiting and recreating other temporalities all anew. In doing so, we could sing and laugh together. I return to this moment, recalling and feeling the reinvigoration of that experience.

Upon subsequent analysis, the ease that I felt during my concert attendance could be challenged by the ongoing exclusion of Queers of Colour in a heavily gentrified area of New York City and within the queercore movement writ large. However, unlike the Met, this time and space offered a world that subverted capitalism and normativity through its aesthetics and homage to queer punk culture. Nonetheless, it also remains an imperfect experience enriched by an intersectional reflection.

My final chapter offers a picture of a relatively hidden queer art that has evaded significant documentation and analysis. Motivated by my personal encounters with stick-and-poke, its ubiquity amongst my queer friends, and finding mentions of the practice throughout other forms of art, I believe this to be a relatively common queer practice. By exploring the various aesthetics associated with the art form, I show how stick-and-poke tattoos challenge mainstream expectations of temporality and productivity. Although the overarching category of "tattoo" in North American culture still connotes some aspects of deviance, it has become enveloped in the realms of chrononormativity and capitalism. I suggest that the queer stick-and-poke tattoo, as it might be practiced by amateurs outside

of tattoo shops, challenges conventional twenty-first-century tattoo art that demands particular artistic standards.

The nature of the stick-and-poke requires that the recipient be present to acquire the art pieces, and unlike the machine tattoo, the slowness of manual hand-poking extends the process. These moments, I suggest, are examples of something akin to Elizabeth Freeman's temporal drag, wherein the practice of an outdated method reminds us that the hyperproductivity of capitalism has left many precarious queer people behind (2010). Additionally, the time spent between practitioner and recipient allows for extended moments of meaning-making through the slow process, similar to how Benjy and Fleischmann create moments of laughter and hilarity through digressions while creating art together (2019). Finally, I suggest that the imperfection of the method allows for an appreciation of art regardless of skill or prowess, perhaps enacting an adolescent mode where we value the amateur, challenging the perceived temporal linearity of progress. I suggest, then, that this practice, like the other artistic moments, allows for a fleeting moment outside of chrononormativity, wherein queers might connect and feel a sense of reprieve from the embodied discordance of capitalism. Valuing art that is not good enough is a way to subvert capitalism's affinity for coopting various art forms.

6.2 I Have to Let it Linger

With its diversions, dawdling, and lingering, the process of writing and researching this dissertation has echoed a variety of the queer aesthetic forms I take to be meaningful. During a coworking Zoom session with fellow PhD candidates, I edited my fourth chapter and explained to my peers how it felt a little strange to hang on to a concert that

had happened almost five years prior, in 2019. I noted the irony in this acknowledgment, given the temporal nature of my thesis. Still, I heard some socially constructed voice in the recesses of my mind that felt like a slightly ashamed version of myself: “Get over it,” it said, “Move on.”

Similarly, when I consider *Camp: Notes on Fashion*, I think of how the initial waves made by the 2019 Met Gala were overshadowed by other fashion news as early as the following week and certainly by subsequent gala looks in the years since. When news moves as quickly as twenty-first-century technology allows, people get bored; they move on quickly. Having failed to publish anything on the trending topic of camp in a timely fashion, that same hotly embarrassed feeling arose, reminding me of my sluggish pace. Of course, having chosen these topics to explore, I was committed to finishing this project. But beyond this, I have not moved past any of it. Now and then, I will relive the concert through old photographs and play *Hunx’s* songs to feel the crowd’s laughter again. As I prolong the discussion of camp beyond the limitations of the mainstream zeitgeist, I refuse to let new trends sweep away the importance of these cultural and counter-cultural experiences. The culture moves forward, but this does not mean everything worth being said has been explored. By returning to these moments, I am letting them stretch beyond the rigidity of chrononormativity. I dwell on fleeting instances that simultaneously diffuse into present and future times.

6.3 On the Ephemeral

The examples I prioritize in this thesis are ephemeral, subverting the inflexibility of a straight, linear time. Their ephemerality has contributed to some of the difficulty in

capturing the significance of these experiences. Fleischmann's encounters with González-Torres's work were moments in time that represented the flux of their moving body and the ingestion of the candy. Their digressions and dawdling in creating art with Benjy resist being pinned down and remind us of the joy in the process. Even in discussing a large exhibition such as the one at the Met, I draw from a curated event that lasted only for a brief period, and I point to my singular engagement with it. Additionally, the specifics of the concert are irreproducible. The acquisition of a stick-and-poke is perhaps a few hours at most. Tattoos change, are hidden, covered up, and decay with our finite body. The temporalities fostered by these various art forms are fleeting and created, sometimes ad-hoc. As such, queer joy and belonging are the products of our temporary alternate worlds.

6.4 On Taking the Silly Seriously

This thesis has worked to some degree to take the silly seriously. By basking in camp, playfulness, laughter, and, indeed, bad art, I have aimed to bring forth the moments that often resist documentation for their lack of seriousness or, to some, their perceived unimportance. Just as I questioned the amount of lingering I did on bygone moments, I often found myself measuring the value of these moments against some socially constructed objective standard. I would ask myself something like, "What's the point?" as I wrote about "shitty" tattoos. However, I now recognize this is an attempt to legitimize this project according to the standards of a mainstream capitalist world. I therefore continue to hold the notion that there is value in joy and belonging created through other means outside of these value systems.

Nonetheless, there would be other times when these questions of purposefulness would creep up more pressingly. In the face of the many atrocities that would arise in current world affairs, my foray into crummy stick-and-pokes appeared to pale in comparison. This felt especially painful when I witnessed another violent queer- or transphobic hate crime being reported. However, while I will advocate endlessly for the importance of systemic and political change and activism, I continue to insist on the value of joy in itself. The burdens of constant harm and harassment cannot be all we feel in an existence rich with complexity. In light of this, I want to consider the following quotation from Jack Halberstam. While discussing the critical intellectual work done by subcultures that is "scavenged" by the mainstream, they write:

> Queer academics can—and some should—participate in the ongoing project of recording queer culture as well as interpreting it and circulating a sense of its multiplicity and sophistication. The more intellectual records we have of queer culture, the more we contribute to the project of claiming for the subculture the radical cultural work that either gets absorbed into or claimed by mainstream media. (2005, p. 159)

Thus, while I advocate for the value of queers finding temporal respite in joy and belonging, untethered from the demands of an unjust world, my project is a political one. Of course, this must be the case as I insist that a queer lens has a political valence. I am uncovering the inane and the art that is not 'good enough,' and in doing so, I am adding to the archive of queer culture. Like many of the theorists newly engaging with the concept of queer joy outlined in my introduction, I am showing that our existence is robust beyond mainstream narratives of victimization. Additionally, in the spirit of

Halberstam, I hope to document some small facets of queer culture, even as mainstream aesthetics might continue to subsume them.

6.5 Future Considerations

My project has helped showcase how queer people have always been making art. When the material circumstances of our world do not prioritize time for queer joy and belonging, queer artists have shown through their resourcefulness and creativity that they have been finding ways to do this on their own. While some queer artistic figures, such as Oscar Wilde, have earned mainstream praise, I have become inadvertently interested in the artists who keep creating outside of the mainstream. Art can be found anywhere, not just in the hallowed halls of the Met, and queer artists of all skills, identities, and geographical locations will continue to create.

True to my penchant for slowness and dawdling, I have not yearned for life in the big city. Aside from my brief rendezvous into metropolitan areas such as New York and some nostalgia for this capital of queer art, I ultimately long for a small to mid-sized city. The bustle and movement of a metropolis overwhelms me; I need quiet and proximity to nature. Yet queer scholarship has focused on the city as the core of queer life, a position only recently contested (Weston, 1995; Gray, 2009; Crawford, 2013). Nonetheless, I, like many other queer people, also want art and creativity in other towns. In this conversation, I think of a sticker I once saw on a lamppost in London, Ontario, my current city of residence: “Support London Artists Before they move to Toronto.” Insofar as I have argued for art’s capacity to be a conduit to joy and belonging, it is needed in London just as much as in Toronto or New York.

Therefore, I consider my work on the queer joy and belonging that can be created through art as a potential starting point for further research into the value and cultivation of queer art in smaller cities, towns, or even rural spaces. The importance of queer archiving resonates here: there is work to be done in recognizing the queerness present in the existing historical archives of non-metropolitan locations; additionally, there ought to be folks who document and value the creativity that currently flourishes in these spaces. I began early versions of this project motivated by the search for a queer community in London as a new resident. In the years since, I have found a special place amongst a growing collection of artists and misfits I consider a core part of the London I know. Some local artists successfully sell their wares and secure grants to support their livelihood. Others keep making, playing, singing, laughing, drawing, and creating, even in the face of economic precarity, for the sake of the process itself. Launching from the findings in this thesis, I hope to continue to advocate for the inherent value in artistic practice for queer joy and belonging in a variety of spaces, regardless of mainstream standards of success.

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Curriculum Vitae

Name:	Amy Keating
Post-secondary Education and Degrees:	Trent University Peterborough, Ontario, Canada 2011-2015 B.A. Carleton University Ottawa, Ontario, Canada 2015-2017 M.A. The University of Western Ontario London, Ontario, Canada 2017-2024 Ph.D.
Honours and Awards:	Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Master's Award 2016-2017 Ontario Graduate Scholarship 2017-2018 Ontario Graduate Scholarship 2018 (awarded and declined) Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Doctoral Fellowship 2018-2022
Related Work Experience	Grading Assistant Trent University 2014-2015 Graduate Teaching Assistant Carleton University 2015-2017 Graduate Teaching Assistant Western University 2017-2022

Grading Assistant
OCAD University
2021-2022

Instructor
Western University
2020-2024

Publications:

Keating, A. (2022). Taking a moment: Embodying temporality and finding a 'queer sense of belonging' through live performance. *Panic at the Discourse, 2*(1). https://www.panicdiscourse.com/embodying-temporality/

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